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Julia Kavanagh in Her Times

Novelist and Biographer
1824 - 1877

by

Michael Forsyth
B.A (Hons) (Open) M.A (Open)

Submitted for the Degree of
Doctor of Philosophy
In Literature

Submitted 17 March 1999

AUTHOR'S No: H0126899

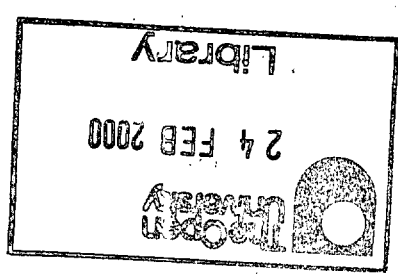
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In the preparation of this dissertation, I particularly wish to thank the Library of the University of Sheffield for regular access, and the Leeds Library for granting me the privilege of access to its volumes of works by Julia Kavanagh. My thanks go to Birmingham Public Libraries and the National Gallery of Ireland for permission to reproduce a letter by Kavanagh and her portrait.

For keeping me sufficiently mobile to complete this work, my gratitude goes to the staff of the Sheffield Rheumatology Unit. Finally, and most importantly, my thanks go to my wife for endless patience.

Michael Forsyth MBE
September 1998

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Julia Kavanagh

by Henri Chanut

The only known portrait

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Chapter 1: Introduction

The Victorian writer and biographer Julia Kavanagh (1824-77) has not, so far as can be ascertained, been the subject of an extended study, though she was both popular and critically acclaimed during her career. This omission, which the present examination seeks to rectify, can be attributed to a combination of factors. The first of these is the difficulty of obtaining her works, which have not been in print during the twentieth century. It would be tempting, if facile, to conclude that a second factor is that her neglect means that she is no longer worthy of interest, either from the general public or from the literary specialist. The third inhibiting factor is the lack of useful biographical material on an author who was reclusive in life, who died in France and whose sole legatee was a blind mother unlikely to keep papers.

The last of these factors has limited the scope of the present investigation because of the lack of biographical data, but a study of Kavanagh's work shows her to be a skilled writer with a distinctive ethos and interests whose fiction and non-fiction alike deserve reassessment. The novels in particular suggest a reason for her posthumous decline into obscurity. A literary work may attract initial attention either because it captures the *zeitgeist* or because it displays unique characteristics which set a new pattern. The works of Charlotte and Emily Brontë exemplify the latter category; Kavanagh, who was greatly influenced by *Jane Eyre*, was of the first, offering a "safe", contained version of some of the themes of that work. The moral stance and values of the majority of the novels was congenial to a substantial section of the mid-Victorian public. Such close identification with the moral tone of her times' acceptance, however, may well have worked against Kavanagh's reputation with the reaction against the mid-Victorian ethos her work so clearly embodied. To a significant degree, her enthusiastic espousal, rather than simple acceptance, of values and certainties generally abandoned by the 1890s undermined the possibility of a continuing readership.

This study seeks to examine Julia Kavanagh's work both in its characteristic qualities and within the general context of mid-Victorian literature. A few recent studies have examined either single works by Kavanagh or a selection of characteristic novels in relation to broader themes^[1]. There has, however, been no significant reappraisal of Kavanagh's entire body of work now that both the moral climate in which she flourished and that which replaced and rejected it are at a safe historic distance. The present study seeks to provide a basis for such an appraisal. As an initial study, the discussion of the works will be broadly chronological, focusing separately on key works both of fiction and non-fiction. Within that framework, attention will be given to aspects which may merit further study. One of these will be the examination of Kavanagh's work both as novelist and biographer to identify her characteristic moral and aesthetic universe. Another element will be to investigate how Kavanagh both draws on and contributes to the broad development of the mid-Victorian novel, and, in particular, woman's novel. Although Kavanagh's narrative techniques will be analysed as appropriate throughout this study, a single chapter of *Adèle* will also be considered closely in Chapter 9.

Kavanagh was not only a largely orthodox Victorian moralist, but an active propagator of those moral values, choosing to make her views overt. This contributed to her work being judged old-fashioned by Mrs McQuoid^[2] in the 1890s, though McQuoid was only two years younger than Kavanagh - and, to a certain degree, her successor in novels set in France. In the twentieth century, an associate of Dickens, Percy Fitzgerald, was writing about the women contributors to *Household Words* and *All The Year Round* in terms repudiating his youthful enthusiasm for the writers of the 1850s and 1860s, particularly the women writers of that period.^[3] This is, perhaps, hardly surprising, however unjust; the High Victorian period marked a high point for women authors making their mark, and becoming associated with its values. From the *fin de siècle* and later, only the most innovative, Eliot and the Brontës, continued in general esteem. Even Mrs Gaskell's reputation relied largely on *Cranford* until the reaction against mid-Victorian pieties abated. Their male counterparts, less identified with moral absolutism, and protected by the overwhelming masculine bias of literary scholarship, survived better. To be fair, there was a degree of truth in the

identification of many minor women writers with excessive piety, and this was exacerbated by association with a society which was ruled by, and took much of its tone from a woman. By the time that Ernest Baker wrote his *History of the English Novel* in 1937, he was, effectively, commenting on Kavanagh as a historical curiosity who was “fondly supposed superior, but [has] not survived”.^[4]

Any evaluation of Kavanagh’s writings must take into account that her body of work as a whole was uneven, and that it would be difficult to advance a claim that *all* her work should continue to be read. Nevertheless, it is clear that the best of her works remained popular for half a century, with reprints and new editions - particularly of *Madeleine*, her first work - appearing for more than two decades after her death. That degree of longevity argues a potential value, which makes the later eclipse of Kavanagh’s fiction and non-fiction more puzzling. The timing of that decline may, however, shed some illumination. It was almost exactly at the end of the nineteenth century that Kavanagh’s works ceased to attract a readership. Given the noticeable changes both in popular thought and in the novel during the 1890s and into the first decade of the twentieth century, that decline is strongly suggestive that Kavanagh’s works were then not merely out of fashion, but had become directly antipathetic to the ethos of the new century. Her literary standing - though probably not her popularity - had waned as the Britain of the 1890s turned increasingly from the values of high Victorianism, but a possibly ageing readership had continued to read her works.

Those who aligned themselves with the twentieth century - and there is a tendency for centennial and millennial dates to promote revisions of sensibilities - would reject Kavanagh both for the values she represented and for a style which, as McQuoid’s comments suggest, was already regarded as passé. The passage of a century since Kavanagh’s works were last printed offers the opportunity for a more neutral perspective. Consideration of her work today suggests that her best work displays qualities and a degree of individuality which merits judicious revaluation. To do so would, in part, restore the reputation she enjoyed during much of her creative lifetime. The secure place she occupied among her fellow writers, and the fact that she was recognised as having particular talents and expertise - Mrs Gaskell was reluctant to attempt an article on her favourite French author without ensuring that Kavanagh had not already covered the ground - suggests that

her contemporary reputation was not merely due to an easy popularity. Furthermore, any neglect of her output overlooks the consideration that she invented and dominated a small genre of her own, drawing on her knowledge and love of France and French society. The 1916 edition of the Cambridge History of English Literature describes her as having produced one of the best French novels by an English hand. Underpinning that French background was a familiarity with French literature equal to her understanding of the English tradition.

That observation leads to another crucial element in judging Kavanagh's significance. It is clear from her non-fiction in particular that she had a clear concept of a women's tradition in literature quite distinct from that of male novelists. To be rather more accurate, she recognised two distinct women's traditions, one in the French novel and one in the English novel. She attempted to identify a commonality between these two traditions in her linked works on women novelists, though this was, in her case, so closely bound up with her parallel view of women's contribution to the history of the Christian faith that the work is somewhat flawed. Nevertheless, her discussion of the women's tradition makes her a significant figure in the earliest development of a feminist criticism, though the conclusions she draws are crucially different to those of the late twentieth century.

There is, however, a very marked difference in the theoretical constructs of Kavanagh the historical biographer and her general practice as popular novelist (though exceptions must be made in particular for the two single-volume works, *Madeleine* and *Rachel Gray*, which appear to have a more personal meaning for the author). The novels are very much of their time, drawing on themes and techniques widely practised after the success of *Jane Eyre*. That is not to say that they do not have their own distinctive flavour within that genre; within this study, some consideration will be given to the evidence for a particular Kavanagh milieu, with recurrent themes and types. This goes beyond the simple use of French country life (or, on occasion, that of working class Paris) which Kavanagh made her own. Rather, there are situations and relationships which occur across her career in various ways which are recognisably hers.

It is not only the idea of a women's moral tradition which is a persistent element of Kavanagh's work; a less individual, but personally important tradition is also a constant theme

throughout her career. She began writing at a time when the Catholic hierarchy was beginning to return to England for the first time in centuries, and she takes every opportunity to bear witness to her Catholic faith. It is, however, closely integrated with her concept of a woman's tradition; Kavanagh's Catholicism, in her fiction at least, has a distinctively feminine cast. Despite the masculine dominance of Catholicism, priests make few appearances in her pages; after the two gentle and slightly humorous old curés of *Madeleine*, there is only a rather opportunist and satirically observed father in the short story "An Excellent Opportunity". There is, otherwise, no direct criticism of the paternalist structures of Roman Catholicism, though it cannot be ruled out that *Madeleine* itself, clearly based as it is on the life of Jeanne Jugan, is an implicit criticism of the way that the founder of the Little Sisters of the Poor was removed from the leadership of the order she founded by the intervention of a priest.

To attempt a life of Julia Kavanagh presents special problems. She died in Nice, single, and still caring for her blind mother. To Mrs Kavanagh's blindness we can reasonably attribute the lack of documentary evidence available to record Kavanagh's life, beyond the sparse obituaries; letters and documents would be of little meaning to a blind woman. The only substantial memorial to Kavanagh, by Mrs Charles Martin in the *Irish Magazine*, was based on second-hand stories from unnamed friends of Kavanagh; Martin herself never met her. It seems likely that Charles W. Wood, son of Mrs Henry Wood, and editor of *Argosy*, knew her well, enough to help her mother piece together the stories that form the posthumous *Forget-Me-Nots*, but his introduction adds little but knowledge of some circumstances of Kavanagh's death. Remaining letters are largely receipts or agreements with publishers, and the only semi-personal account we have is in *A Summer and Winter in the Two Sicilies*. In fact, only one publication during Kavanagh's lifetime gives any substantial information, and it seems more than likely that this was heavily drawn on for the obituaries which appeared in 1877. This source, the *Cyclopaedia of Female Biography*^[5], was a part-work, and the editor may well have applied to Kavanagh herself for biographical details. Its value as a contemporary source must, however, be tempered by the fact that Kavanagh and her family are referred to throughout as 'Kavanah'. It describes her as

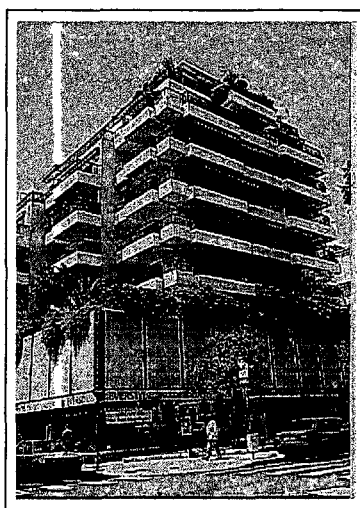
a distinguished writer of the present day; although of Irish birth and parentage, she has devoted her pen chiefly to depict the manners and scenery of France, amid which the greater part of her life has been passed. The date of Miss Kavanah's birth is 1824; the place Thurles, in the county of Tipperary. Her mother's name was Sophie Fitzpatrick^[6], and her father was^[7] Morgan Kavanah, of an old Limerick family. Whilst she was yet a child, her parents left Ireland, and after a brief sojourn in London, passed over to France, and took up their abode in Paris,^[8] where Julia received her education, and acquired that intimate knowledge of French society which she has turned to such good account in her works. In her twentieth year, that is in 1844, Miss Kavanah came to London, with the determination of devoting herself to literary pursuits. She commenced by contributing tales and essays to various periodicals . . .

After a summary of Kavanagh's publications up to *Grace Lea* (sic), the article ends "She writes pleasantly and fluently, with an *esprit* more French than English, but her usual tone is sound and healthy, notwithstanding her continental education."

With the major exceptions that Kavanagh devoted much of her time to looking after and to an undetermined extent supporting, her invalid mother, and the knowledge that they were abandoned by 1850 at the latest by Morgan Kavanagh, Adams' biography needs little amplification beyond the addition to the canon of her later works, until Kavanagh's death in 1877. The only exceptional event was her single personal foray into public notice at the time of the publication of her father's novel *The Hobbies*^[9]; this will be discussed more fully in the treatment of Kavanagh's *Rachel Gray* in Chapter 7.

Kavanagh's death is more clearly documented than her life. Charles W. Wood, in his preface to the posthumously published *Forget-Me-Nots*, records the accidental fall that ended Kavanagh's life, leaving the mother she had cared for throughout her adult life to outlive her by a decade. There is a minor discrepancy between his account and the official records. According to Wood, Julia's mother Bridget heard her daughter fall at five a.m. on Sunday, 28 October, 1877, and "by eight o'clock that same morning the large, beautiful eyes of Julia Kavanagh had closed in their last sleep." This is not in accordance with the official death certificate. This states that Kavanagh

died at “deux heures du soir”. It may of course, be that Wood’s apparent euphemism for death is quite literal; the “last sleep” he writes of may have been when she lapsed into unconsciousness. The more likely explanation is that the death certificate was based on wrong information. The witness on the certificate was one Jean Brun, aged 61, and giving his occupation as “civier” - a hearse-driver. Given Bridget Kavanagh’s blindness, it is likely that the undertaker who was called to the house undertook to notify the authorities.



Kavanagh’s last home;
24, Rue Gioffredo, Nice as it is today.

However sad the early death, it seems clear that, by the end of her life, Kavanagh was free of the poverty that marked her early days. She is listed on the certificate as a “person of private means”, and had an address in the centre of Nice at 24, Rue Gioffredo. Her long-invalid mother remained in Nice after her daughter’s death, surviving for a further eleven years; when she died on 20 December 1888, she was buried beside her daughter, in the Cimetiere du Chateau, on the hill above the Old Town to the east of Nice. It appears that she finally spurned her connection with the husband who had abandoned her, since she was buried under her maiden name. Neither mother nor daughter now lie beneath the marble memorial recorded by Woods; their remains were removed to the crypt in 1971, and now rest in vault 0757, box 513.

Curiously, “Brigitte Fitzpatrick”^[10] as the memorial plaque at the crypt now has her, after a life of no notability, (except when Julia made her mother co-author of a book of fairy stories, *The Pearl Fountain* (London, 1876)) now enjoys more public remembrance than her once-famous

daughter. Julia Kavanagh remains unmentioned by name on that plaque, her earthly existence perpetuated only as the anonymous "Fille" appended beside her mother's name.

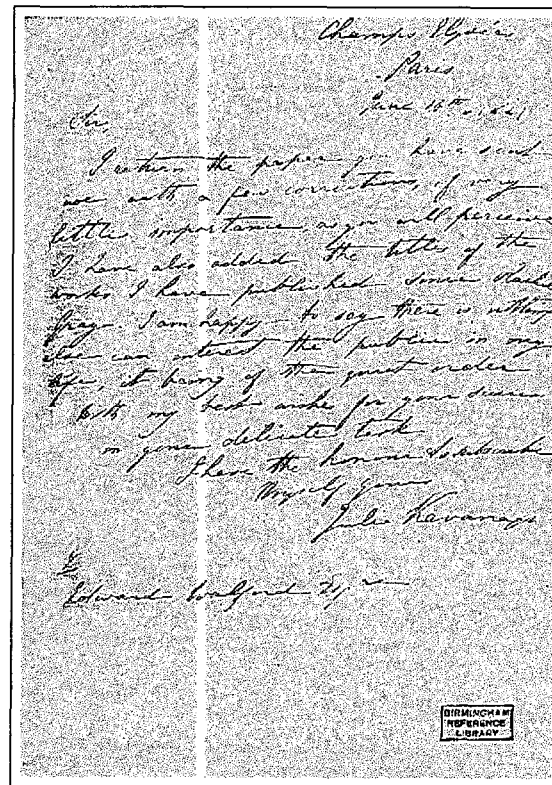
The direct biographical information on Kavanagh is, therefore, readily summarised. She was born, the only child of Morgan Peter Kavanagh and his wife Bridget, née Fitzpatrick, in the small town of Thurles in County Tipperary, at some time in the year 1824. The unusual Christian name Morgan is suggestive; it occurs regularly in the early history of the Kavanagh family who had been among the kings in Ireland, and it is possible that Kavanagh was a lineal descendant of some distant McMorrough. Whatever the truth of that - and the loss of so many Irish records in 1916 makes it unlikely it can ever be resolved - Julia Kavanagh's father seems to have been a figure that the aristocratic Kavanaghs would not have wished to own. His branch of the Kavanagh line was clearly without substantial wealth, though there must have been sufficient for him to acquire a considerable education. Already a published, if unsuccessful, poet at the time of his daughter's birth, Morgan Peter Kavanagh moved his family, at some point in his daughter's childhood, first to London and subsequently to France. Kavanagh has left no direct record of these days, but her education seems to have been extensive, and she displays, in her novels and short stories, familiarity with the French education system and the training of French teachers. That education does, however, appear wider than could be accounted for in the French school system, and it must remain a matter of conjecture as to what part of it may have been received in school and what at home, through the tutelage of her eccentric father. It is certainly possible that before the Kavanagh family returned to England in 1844, Julia could have been a pupil teacher in France.

The return to England has some mystery about it. Either Morgan Kavanagh brought his family to London and then abandoned them, or, possibly, he abandoned them in France and forced their return. Whatever the facts, Kavanagh was certainly supporting herself and her mother, apparently by her pen, by 1850. It is likely that this was initially partially by journalism, though examples have not been identified. By 1850, however, with two books published, she was substantially the breadwinner for her invalid mother and herself, though it appears possible, drawing solely on a hint in *Rachel Gray*, that there was some fairly meagre allowance paid by her father. The

first work which can be clearly attributed to her was an article published in *Chambers Miscellany* on the French Prizes for Virtue established in the 1830s under a trust set up by the late French politician and philanthropist Baron de Montyon. This was later printed as a 32 page pamphlet. While anonymous, it seems to have been generally known to have been Kavanagh's work.^[11] Her first longer work was a single-volume tale for children, but her first important impact was with *Madeleine: A Tale of Auvergne* in 1848. In fact, the central character of that novel is, as has already been noted, based on Jeanne Jugan, who is recorded in *The Montyon Prizes* as a recipient of one of the Prizes for Virtue. Kavanagh followed this by an initially rapid, and later steady output of both novels and non-fiction works concentrating principally on the role of women, but including one travel piece, recording a long holiday taken with her mother in Italy.

Throughout her working life, she appears to have avoided public notice, though there is evidence that she was known to her fellow writers. As well as the correspondence and meeting with Charlotte Brontë, her work was reviewed by George Eliot, and she was known to Mrs Gaskell and to Dickens, who passed her address to the French publishers Hachette. At the end of her life, she appears to have been friendly with Charles W Wood, the son of Mrs Henry Wood, who by that time had succeeded his mother as editor of *Argosy*. Wood in fact took some trouble to help Kavanagh's mother, collating a variety of existing short stories into the posthumous *Forget-Me-Nots*, using the scrap of introduction Kavanagh had already penned, contributing a short preface, and publishing a few fragments in *Argosy*. After Mrs Kavanagh's death, *Argosy* also published seven short poems.

The personal discretion which Kavanagh maintained about herself was consistent, though to what extent this was genuinely the result of the claimed dullness of her life is perhaps more contentious. That claim was contained in the letter overleaf, covering some amended biographical details, which Kavanagh sent in apparent response to a request from Edward Walford in 1861^[12]. It appears likely that the information was intended to accompany a photograph of Kavanagh in a periodical publication, consisting of photographic portraits and biographical sketches of a typically laudatory and bland nature, of which Walford was then editor.



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The publication, however, ceased at about this time, and Kavanagh's item never appeared. No photograph has been traced, and the only known portrait is that now owned by the National Gallery of Ireland, which was donated to them by her mother, some three years after the author's death. Of more importance than her physical appearance, however, is Kavanagh's description of her life as "of the quiet order", with "nothing else that can interest the public". In only one instance, on the publication of her father's novel *The Hobbies*, did Kavanagh bring herself to the public notice. There is much that must remain conjectural about that event, which is dealt with elsewhere in this study.

A final facet of Kavanagh's oeuvre which merits attention for the insight which it gives into the broader stream of mid-Victorian fiction is the balance she maintained, during most of her career, between a distinctive personal viewpoint and approach, and an apparent close attention to trends in the market place (see Chapter 2). Consistently, throughout her output, she embraces aspects of novels which were succeeding with the reading public while maintaining an approach and métier which was distinctively her own. That is not to say that her standards were consistently high;

Kavanagh's work remained second in importance to looking after her mother, and at times, particularly immediately after the initial success of her first two adult fictions, some of the work was undoubtedly slapdash and strained. It was some time before she learned consistently to cope with the special demands of the three-volume format demanded by Victorian publishers.

Despite her faults, however, Kavanagh at her best is a skilled writer with an individual voice who maintains a discernible standpoint. In her most important works, her writing has more to recommend it than the "poetic feeling" praised by the *Dictionary of National Biography*, and often exhibits a shrewd and subtle insight into the constrained world of the middle-class Victorian woman, together with a moral judgement which is consistent, and firm, while remaining alive to the pressures of life, particularly for young people and single women.

Notes

- [1] Kestner, Joseph, *Protest and Reform: the British Social Narrative by Women, 1827-1867* (London, 1985), and Foster, Shirley, *Victorian Women's Fiction: Marriage, Freedom and the Individual* (London and Sydney, 1985)
- [2] In Oliphant, M., *Women Novelists of Queen Victoria's Reign: a book of appreciations* (London, Hurst and Blackett, 1897) pp. 251-262.
- [3] Fitzgerald, Percy H., *Memories of Charles Dickens* (Bristol, 1913) p. 276.
- [4] Baker, Ernest A. *The History of the English Novel* (London, 1937) Vol. 5, p. 109. Despite this disparaging comment, Baker remarks also that Kavanagh "was one of the first to put into fiction observations which . . . go into records of travel" and "could paint characters and manners, and had a knack for agreeable comedy, or at any rate farce."
- [5] Adams, H.G., (ed.) *A Cyclopaedia of Female Biography* (London, Groombridge, 1857), Part 7, p. 452
- [6] There is no other source for this name; all others including the title page of the volume of fairy stories jointly published with her daughter, give Bridget, and the burial records in Nice confirm this, though there the spelling is rendered as "Brigitte".
- [7] The use of the past participle "was" opens the possibility that any information given to Adams gave the

impression that Morgan Kavanagh was dead; such a construction is understandable in the case of her mother, where Adams was quoting her maiden name. This may, however, be reading too much into what may well have originated only in Adams' editorial approach.

- [8] Kavanagh's considerable knowledge of, and use of Normandy in her novels and short stories argues strongly that much of her time in France was also spent in a Normandy town close to the coast; there is no overt evidence to indicate whether town or country came first, though the recurring association of Normandy with childhood may suggest the latter.

- [9] Kavanagh, Morgan Peter, *The Hobbies: A novel* (London, Newby, 1857)

- [10] The reversion by Bridget Kavanagh to her maiden name raises interesting speculations about the woman that Charlotte Brontë assumed to be simple-minded. Not only was she buried under her maiden name, but she also apparently took steps to ensure that she was publicly recognised under that name. Morgan Peter Kavanagh died two years earlier than his daughter; it may be surmised that his widow retained the Kavanagh name for her daughter's sake. *The Pearl Fountain* was published in England as by "Bridget and Julia Kavanagh". Given that Julia's reputation could be regarded as having commercial value, the order in which the authors were named may not have been simply alphabetic, but may also have been intended to demonstrate that Mrs Kavanagh played a substantial, and perhaps major role in its composition. Children's literature can often have a long currency, and *The Pearl Fountain*, in an Italian translation, was still in print in the 1930s, under the authorship of "Bridget Fitzpatrick and Julia Kavanagh".

- [11] It appears that Kavanagh's confidence was much boosted by this publication (often misrepresented in reference books as a novel), and that she was proud of it; rather endearingly, the copy held by the British Library (shelf mark 8285.a.71.(3.)) has a pencil note on the opening page to the effect that it was presented by Miss Julia Kavanagh.

- [12] Champs Elysées, Paris, June 14th. 1861.

Sir,

I return the papers you have sent me with a few corrections, of very little importance, as you will perceive. I have also added the titles of the works I have published since Rachel Gray. I am happy to say there is little here can interest the public in my life, it being of the quiet order. With my best wishes for your success in your delicate task,

I have the honour to subscribe myself yours,

Julia Kavanagh.

Chapter 2: The Literary Context

Major writers are often, though not exclusively, sufficiently innovatory to give the impression of independence from their peers. Creating styles and genres, they dominate and influence so visibly that it overshadows both their literary friendships and the common literary history which they share with their contemporaries. In fact, their literary friendships can be significant in identifying the individuality of their contributions, as, for example, in the cases of Dickens and Wilkie Collins, or Charlotte Brontë and Elizabeth Gaskell. The literature of their childhood may be enlightening; much, for example, has been made of the works which fired the imagination of Dickens, and the juvenilia of the Brontës and of Jane Austen offer useful clues to both the nature of their childhood and adolescent reading, and to their later development. Such materials can illuminate the internal logic of the development of a writer's body of work.

That being said, there is a high incidence of major writers who, for one reason or another, have an upbringing which has rendered them either physically or temperamentally separate from the culture in which their work appears. It may well be that exile has been a major factor in stimulating the literary output of such writers as Henry James or Joseph Conrad. The social and economic history of Ireland has produced a high incidence of exiles, yet even so, the roll call of major Irish writers from exile seems disproportionate; Jonathan Swift, Richard Sheridan, Oscar Wilde, George Bernard Shaw, James Joyce and Samuel Beckett are sufficient examples. Exile, however, is not something which confers a degree of individuality only on major figures.

Julia Kavanagh was clearly a writer who developed her literature in exile from her native Ireland, and the degree to which she incorporates both French feeling and background does tend to lend her a superficial distinctiveness from many of her Victorian contemporaries. Though Kavanagh

was not normally innovative in style or concerns, the French background she offered her readers was married to a characteristic moral ethos and a fluid style superior to most practitioners of the mid-Victorian three-volume novel. That there is a clear and interesting pattern of development within her oeuvre is something which this study seeks to prove, but it would be clearly excessive to consider her work as having major significance outside the literary context in which it was first produced. The best claim which may be made for her is that she was a Victorian writer who was atypical only in terms of the quality and range of her output.

The individuality of her works seems largely attributable to an unusual childhood. Normally, the formative background of a writer is that of the society in which his or her work is produced. There are those, like Henry James and James Joyce, who need the perspective of adult exile to reflect on their background. Kavanagh's experience was different again; she wrote French stories for an English readership. The experience she brought to the task was that of an emigré to the first culture, out of touch with the latter. The hint of alienation from both may well have stimulated her writing as a means of clarifying her understanding of the world about her. For Kavanagh, the task of understanding was made yet more complex, since there is some internal evidence in her work that her formative adolescent reading was such as to amount to a generation gap. Like the Brontë children, she was brought up in an environment of literary pretensions, since her father, like theirs, was an author in his own right, albeit as a poet; his first work, *The Wanderings of Lucan and Dinah, a poetical romance, in 10 cantos*, was published in London in the year of his only child's birth, 1824, and was followed by *The Reign of Lockrin, a poem* in 1839. The titles of these works alone indicate the strong influence of the Romantics. Since Kavanagh, according to the sparse information available, was said to have been educated at home, it is likely that the young Julia's access to books would have been largely dictated by her father's tastes, particularly in France. Evidence from Julia's works suggest that the family were probably in Paris at some point, but spent most of their time until their return to London in 1844 in Normandy, probably in a small town. It seems unlikely that the Kavanagh family would have been in a position to buy many English works during this period, so that Julia's English reading may well have limited largely

to works acquired by Morgan Kavanagh by the early 1830s. (It is probable, given the deep impression which France made on Julia, that she moved there at an early age). In addition to this literary isolation, much of her understanding of the niceties of English or Irish social mores must also have come from her parents or other emigrés. We can thus hypothesise a library which remained some one or two decades behind prevailing taste in England forming the freely available reading matter of the adolescent Julia Kavanagh, a hypothesis which is strengthened by the close acquaintance with the works of female novelists in both France and Britain up to Austen and Lady Morgan which she was to demonstrate in her two works of literary biography, *French Women of Letters* (London, 1861) and *English Women of Letters* (London, 1862). It would be injudicious, however, to infer that Kavanagh knew nothing of later works in either country, however limited her opportunities; since the *Women of Letters* books outline a historical tradition, all her chosen writers were dead.

Julia Kavanagh's distance from her cultural surroundings was not, however, limited simply to cultural and social matters; other personal circumstances contributed. Her appearance was one such; even the notably meagre Charlotte Brontë was moved to comment on Kavanagh as "a little, almost dwarfish figure to which even I had to look down - not deformed - that is - not hunchbacked but long armed with a large head and ... a strange face"^[1]. In the circumstances of mid-Victorian society, such a young woman, from a poor family, was likely to become - as Kavanagh was - a lifelong spinster. The situation did not end there. Her father was notably eccentric, and, apparently, ruthless in his pursuit of his own way. His eccentricity may be judged from his philological work, the value of which work may be judged from his theory that all language derived from the single word "O", meaning both God and sun, and produced by primitives representing the shape of the latter with their mouths^[2]. By 1850, Morgan Peter Kavanagh had abandoned his wife and daughter, though he was to re-appear later to cause Julia much professional anxiety with his novel *The Hobbies*^[3].

Other factors which lent the young and struggling author a degree of distance from the society in which she was to work included both personal circumstances, and, it may be tentatively

hypothesised, social class. In the first place, Kavanagh had to devote much of her energies to her abandoned mother for the rest of her life, both as nurse and provider. The second, less certain, factor is that of an element of alienation from any particular social class as a result of Kavanagh's upbringing. Her father's possible relationship with one of Ireland's oldest noble families has already been mentioned (p. 8 *supra*). His pursuit of scholarship and poetry suggests an upper-class outlook, but there is no indication of any substantial private income to support an equivalent lifestyle. France is often, in Kavanagh's books, a place to which the English retire to live as well as possible on reduced incomes. To judge from the evidence of her novels and stories, Kavanagh's youth in Normandy and Paris was one in which her acquaintanceships were closer to the peasants and petty bourgeoisie than to more exalted classes. The final distancing factor was Kavanagh's devout Catholicism; she returned to England at a time of popular suspicion of "papal aggression" as the Roman hierarchy was re-introduced for the first time since the Reformation.

These factors go some way to account for the very private life Kavanagh chose to lead (though, in her final years, there seems to have been a more social content to her life). It would, however, be inappropriate to overstress the concept of Kavanagh as outsider; there was a very substantial body of single women in Victorian society, many of whom took to writing as a source of income. Nevertheless, like many large minorities, such women fell at the fringes of that society's self-image. Kavanagh was, however, a constant advocate by example of that group, which may, in part account for her contemporary status and success. That success was, however, bought at a price; Kavanagh had, after her first flush of success, to stay aware of what was popular, and to adopt elements of currently successful works to her own style and taste, and to those of her regular readers. In short, she could afford to lead public taste and attitudes only a little, within some areas with which she soon became identified, but she was, at the same time, able to continue to do so only by paying close commercial attention to her market. There is, in her work, a creative tension between her effective sensitivity to contemporary literary fashion and the distinctive origins of her literary instincts. This chapter seeks to identify the interplay between these two elements.

The opportunity to influence public attitudes was clearly important to Kavanagh. While maintaining her output of novels, she produced a small, yet influential oeuvre of non-fiction. Her solitary essay into travel literature, the record of a long holiday in Italy, is the only non-fiction which does not seek to propound a particular theory or attitude, and may be ignored in this regard. Her other non-fiction however, and to some extent her novels, provide a revealing perspective on the role of the woman novelist as it developed both before and after her lifetime. Kavanagh's viewpoint is bound up with her view that women had made a distinctive contribution to society and to literature in earlier centuries. The works in which she advanced these views were *Woman in France in the Eighteenth Century*^[4], *Women of Christianity*^[5] and two related works of literary history, *French Women of Letters: Biographical Sketches*^[6] and *English Women of Letters: Biographical Sketches*^[7].

At the very outset of her career, however, the young woman who determined, on her return to London at the age of 20, to seek her living (and that of her mother) as a professional writer may well have been almost comically out of touch with the taste of her times when she began to write. At the same time, however, her experiences appear to have enabled her to see cultural milieux with a certain objectivity. Though bilingual, there is no record of her writing for publication in French, yet it is clear from her books that France was where she felt at home. It becomes difficult to decide whether her sensibilities were those of a French author writing in English, or an Anglo-Irish one writing of France, but she remained clear in distinguishing between the subtleties of her two cultures. Her earliest efforts seem to have been journalistic, so that her unusual background may not have been immediately obvious. By 1846, she had produced *The Montyon Prizes*^[8], a work which a succession of literary historians have wrongly assumed to be a novel. It was in fact a pamphlet on a French award scheme for virtue, no more than a reprint of a magazine article from *Chambers Miscellany*. Her first book would also be largely independent of current literary fashion, since it was a children's work, with a pre-Revolutionary French setting, *The Three Paths, A Story for Young People* (London, Chapman and Hall, 1848), but, in the same year, her career proper began with *Madeleine: A Tale of Auvergne, founded on fact*^[9]. As will be seen in Chapter 5, this was a

distinctly individual novel, though whether, in the final analysis, this was to its benefit or hindrance must remain a matter for conjecture. As a simple matter of commercial necessity, a novel, to be successful, must normally acquire an individual character in the public mind if it is to achieve any special success. This can be, and mercifully sometimes is, because of artistic merit, but, in fact, any other grounds will do; scandal, a minor narrative twist or a well-established author, are common enough grounds for notice today, as they were in the middle decades of the nineteenth century, and the then unusual novel format (a single volume), milieu (rural peasants in a remote area of France) and subject matter (an obsessive charitable mission, without love interest) may well have piqued curiosity and ensured a reasonable sale. The mild exoticism of the work probably also served to mask some of the debts to a, by then, rather passé set of literary models. In many ways, *Madeleine*, published when Kavanagh was only 24, sets precedents for elements which were to prove characteristic of her concerns. It is, in its essentials, a semi-fictional working-out of just such a distinctly feminine influence as Kavanagh was to postulate in her non-fiction works. The factual basis for the story is that of Jeanne Jugan, a French servant woman who first established a hospital for the elderly in Brittany, and subsequently founded the order of the Little Sisters of the Poor.

Madeleine is the story of a peasant girl, inarticulate and pious, who conceives the idea of a hospital for the old people of her remote village, and by dint of faith and tenacious will, finally achieves her goal. There is room for considerable speculation about the relationship between Kavanagh's fictional Madeleine Guerin, the real-life Jugan, and the author's strong belief in the value of what she saw as the typically feminine virtues of compassion, supportiveness and, to an extent, their capacity for self-sacrifice. While the fictional heroine dies, Jugan outlived Kavanagh, dying at the age of 86 in 1879. In a sense, however, she was cut off from what she had achieved; though the foundress of the order, she was replaced on the instigation of its priest-moderator, Father lePailleur, after less than a year. While the French Academy recognised her by the award of a Montyon Prize in 1845, the church denied her recognition as foundress until after her death. In her oblique way, Kavanagh was, perhaps, offering a parable of the reception likely to be met by women who made too decisive an impact on society.

Though a very large number of published books during the 1840s and 1850s were theological or aimed at moral improvement, *Madeleine* was, as a serious novel, an unusual offering. The literary tastes of the period revolved around other themes. During Kavanagh's teenage years, Charles Dickens had been establishing himself, with a prodigious output of works, and Carlyle was secure as the pre-eminent social thinker of his day. A society which was beginning to match the changes of the Industrial Revolution with an ethos of dynamic, progressive advance was, simultaneously, coming to terms with the idea that the promotion of such advances entailed a responsibility for ensuring that the advances were beneficial. The seeds were sown among writers of fiction for a sharp analysis of the "condition of England". In the four years before Kavanagh's decision to pursue a career as author matured into her first novel, Disraeli published the first two novels of his "Young England" trilogy, with *Coningsby* (1844) and *Sybil* (1845), and, in the latter, coined his famous "two nations" description of England. The joyous spirit in which Dickens' career had begun (*Pickwick Papers* in 1836-1837) had given way to more critical works. In a more oblique fashion, Thackeray's deep pessimism about human nature was reflected in the publication of *Vanity Fair* (1847-1848). Twice in the years before the twenty-year-old Kavanagh's return to London, the People's Charter had been presented to Parliament, without success, and the Chartists had rioted in 1842. The Irish famine also loomed across the young Irishwoman's return, in 1846.

None of this found immediate answer in Kavanagh's work; there is, perhaps, a need for a society to be experienced and absorbed before it can properly be examined, and it was to be 1856 before she reflected some of the momentous social upheavals of her early years back in England in *Rachel Gray*. It was again her much-loved France in which she set her second adult novel. The new work was, however, very different from its predecessor. Most of Kavanagh's career in fiction was destined, after *Madeleine*, to be largely circumscribed by the successes of greater contemporaries, the first of whom was Charlotte Brontë. *Nathalie: a tale* (London, Colburn, 1850) was a great popular success, and established the author firmly in her chosen career. It was, however, undeniably linked thematically to *Jane Eyre*, with its plot of a young schoolmistress who becomes the protégée of the owner of the chateau of Sainville. It was to be a key theme in many of Kavanagh's later

novels, yet the working out of her literary progress is by no means as simplistic as that fact would make it appear. *Nathalie* may indeed reflect the reduction of a theme introduced by a major novelist into a recognisable genre, but it remains a not inconsiderable work in its own right, and brought to that genre a considerable depth of feeling for the nuances of French provincial society, in this case that of Normandy. The rigidities of women's lives are particularly well caught, with Nathalie Montolieu caught first in the discipline of the petit bourgeois school, then in the long ennui of the aristocratic chateau, while her sister Rose is equally trapped by family duties and poverty with her aunt. Curiously, as will be discussed in Chapter 5, this work served in its turn, in the view of two writers, to influence Charlotte Brontë.

Despite its debt to *Jane Eyre*, the publication of *Nathalie* meant that Kavanagh was now able to develop a genre - that of the tale of French society - which was, at that time, as novel for the majority of the British reading public as it was for Kavanagh herself. Translations of French women novelists like George Sand or Mme de Staël were widely available, but they were written for domestic readers. For Anglophones, Kavanagh provided a knowledgeable yet detached description of French life which provided a discreet explanation of cultural differences. For Kavanagh herself, however, there may have been a different advantage by sidestepping her comparative unfamiliarity with English society. She could now develop her novelistic skills using a setting in which there was no uncertain grasp of themes and attitudes to be coped with; indeed, it is possibly because she had little to unlearn that Kavanagh was able to produce such a successful work as *Nathalie* in response to the *Jane Eyre* model. In place of a certain gaucheness about English society, she could now offer an authoritative vision of French provincial life.

Kavanagh was, however, beginning to reflect on her experience of the different attitudes to women in English and French society. It was possibly the experience of having two such models, with the opportunity to compare them in a comparatively disinterested fashion, which led Kavanagh into reflections on the whole theme of women's role in society. The conclusions she drew from this came to occupy much of Kavanagh's attention throughout her working life; it is a central theme of her non-fiction works and lies at the heart of several of her novels. In the immediate period following

the success of *Nathalie*, however, novels were to be the principal source of income for Kavanagh, and it was to become clear over the next year or two that Kavanagh's grasp of the attitudes and conventions of English society was not yet complete. Her next two novels, *Daisy Burns: A Tale* (London, Bentley, 1853) and *Grace Lee: A Tale* (London, Smith and Elder, 1855) had English settings and were both less well handled, and less well matched to public taste.

The reasons for this are unclear, but Kavanagh's third novel shows little sense of planning, with episodes begun and discarded without significant contribution to its themes. It was the first evidence of a weakness in the planning and execution of the three volume format; in time she learned to cope with that dominant form, but, except in rare cases, she appeared more relaxed with shorter works. In *Nathalie*, the length had proved little problem, since Kavanagh had the structure of Brontë's work for a model. Her third fiction, however, cast her on her own resources. Although Kavanagh never published in the periodical format employed by many of her contemporaries, *Daisy Burns* has the appearance of something written from moment to moment, with only the sketchiest of outlines for guidance. In the years between *Nathalie* and *Daisy Burns*, a series of highly wrought works were reaching the public; Elizabeth Gaskell had produced *Cranford*, a clear alternative model for feminine authors, and Charlotte Brontë, very probably drawing on *Nathalie* as part of her inspiration, had transformed some of the experiences of her rejected *The Professor* into *Villette*. Against this background, the sudden lapse in standards of a writer many must have thought a likely contender for high honours shows in the sharp criticism of Kavanagh's new novels; *Grace Lee* was, if anything, worse received than its predecessor.

There were, however, other reasons for Kavanagh's failure to meet the standard of her first novels; one of the simplest factors appears to have been the simple pressure of work, for, during the years 1850-1852, she had also produced two of the first of the works in the field of women's history that give such added interest to her career. Though there are four such works, they may most readily be thought of as three, since *French Women of Letters: Biographical Sketches* and *English Women of Letters: Biographical Sketches* were avowedly designed as complementary works. Together with *Woman in France in the Eighteenth Century* (1850), and *Women of Christianity* (1852), we are

given a clear cross section of the way in which several themes intersected and cross-fertilised in Kavanagh's imagination. The French element is strong, as is the way in which Kavanagh constantly cross-relates it to the English experience. (I use English, because that was Kavanagh's term; that she was aware, indeed proud of, her Irish inheritance is clear from some of her fiction, notably in the heroes of *Daisy Burns* and *Queen Mab*, but there is little or no evidence of her spending substantial parts of her adult life in Ireland). The second element is that of literature, a natural one for someone who determined on a writing career at the age of 22. The insistence, in the two sets of *Women of Letters*, on two independent traditions in the novel, and her familiarity with French authors, makes clear the inter-relationship of these two elements. It is interesting to note, but difficult to draw conclusions from, the fact that there is no sign that Kavanagh ever wrote in French; the British Library has a copy of a translation of *Daisy Burns* by a French translator^[10]. This is remarkable given the fact that, by the end of her life, French was the language used at home by Kavanagh, including her dying words to her mother.

The third element is that of religion. Kavanagh was herself an ardent Catholic, yet in many ways her work is ecumenical in tone; *Women of Christianity* contains much about Lutheran, Anglican and Non-Conformist women, including a long section on Elizabeth Fry. The result is that her books were regarded as morally unexceptionable, yet are written from a standpoint which is slightly outside the broad hegemony of English Victorian society as much from the religious as the cultural aspect. Her early books were written at a time when the Roman Catholic hierarchy had just been re-established in England for the first time since the reformation. Again, the religious element inter-relates with her interest in France and in literature; as already mentioned, her first adult novel, *Madeleine*, was based loosely on the life of Jeanne Jugan; in her turn, Jugan occupies two or three pages of *Women of Christianity* - indeed, her story was first treated by Kavanagh as one of the recipients in *The Montyon Prizes*.

Integrated into all three concerns is Kavanagh's interest in the importance of women's roles in European (mainly French and British) society from the 17th century up to her own day. This underlying theory is clearly present in *Woman in France in the Eighteenth Century*, although its full

extent may not have been clear to Kavanagh herself at the beginning, developing in her later non-fiction. However basic at this stage, however, it was certainly clear enough for the ultra-Conservative *Quarterly Review* to devote several pages to an attempt to undermine Kavanagh's thesis. For such a ponderous attack to be launched by an organ which otherwise failed to notice Kavanagh's career, leaving it to the notice of its arch-enemy *The Athenaeum*, suggests strongly that Kavanagh had, in her tentative way, struck a vulnerable point in the armour of contemporary patriarchy. To do so was not, of course, to place herself against the current tide; the previous year had seen the founding of Bedford College for Women in London, while 1850 itself marked the establishment by Frances Buss of the North London Collegiate School for Ladies. Kavanagh's contribution was, however, somewhat different in kind; though she was herself attempting something of an academic nature, what she was implicitly doing with both *Woman in France* and *Women of Christianity* was claiming - or, perhaps, in her terms re-claiming - a whole tradition of women's influence. That thesis was to become more explicit in her two works of literary biography, a decade later. There is, however, no evidence that Kavanagh was involved in the other key element of Victorian feminism at this time, that of enfranchisement; the *Westminster Review's* "The Enfranchisement of Women" article of 1851, and the Women's Suffrage Petition to the House of Lords of that year find no reflection in Kavanagh's writings.

Whatever the importance of her non-fiction at this time, *Daisy Burns* and *Grace Lee* are not of the standards of her first works, and the pressures on Kavanagh were by no means unique. Indeed, Kavanagh's position as a writer verges on the archetypal. John Sutherland's analysis of 872 Victorian novelists for whom biographical information is available indicates that, in the case of women authors, spinsters accounted for a markedly disproportionate number of works.^[11] Kavanagh's 22 works fall well below the output of many of Sutherland's authors, some of whom produced over 100 works. Given her early death, however, Kavanagh's output must have been close to the average. Her physical frailty, and the time she had to devote to caring for her mother, did however make for unusual difficulties, sufficient to attract the kindly attentions of Charlotte Brontë. There is, moreover, much pith in Sutherland's assertion in the same article that, given the enormous

output of the time, to be a contemporary success was to rise well above the average. The weaknesses in the two novels of 1853 and 1855 set them short of the expectations Kavanagh's earlier work had raised, and they remain interesting, if flawed works. It is not, however, valid to defend second-rate works on the grounds that most of their competitors are third rate. These two novels are well below Kavanagh's best, and they came at a time when new competitors were emerging. In addition to the major Victorian authors, competent second-order women novelists such as Diana Mulock (Craik) and Charlotte Yonge were making a reputation for themselves; Mulock's *Agatha's Husband* and Yonge's *Heir of Redclyffe* both appeared in 1853, as Kavanagh's critical reception first faltered.

That being said, *Daisy Burns* has certain points of interest which, despite Kavanagh's weak narrative line, demonstrate a grasp of some aspects of the sexuality of childhood and adolescence which would have been unacceptable to the mid-Victorian mind. That Kavanagh treats these themes without, apparently, any sense of what she was doing suggests a certain naivety on her part, but also a clearer observation than others were prepared to give her credit for. There was certainly an air of disquiet in some of the reviews, and Charlotte Brontë found herself unable to finish the book, but none, apparently felt able to explain that disquiet in anything other than comment on the "unreality" of the novel. In our own post-Freudian age, that reaction suggests, perhaps, more a horrified half-recognition of buried memories than unreality. That is not to ignore the well-documented incidence of child prostitution in Victorian England; the unusual element is that Daisy's infatuation with her unofficial guardian is treated in a positive, if slightly comic way, and Kavanagh's audience were predominantly middle class women.

It should, perhaps, be noted that, although *Daisy Burns* and *Grace Lee* have been discussed together, they were, in fact, separated in 1853 by a prolonged trip by Kavanagh and her mother to France, Switzerland and Italy, later to be recorded in *A Summer and Winter in the Two Sicilies* (1858). The almost fairy-tale plot of the later novel may derive from its gestation during this trip, which Kavanagh's obituary in the Academy refers to as "solacing her arduous labours". Certainly, the eponymous heroine of *Grace Lee* visits some of the places Kavanagh did, a small part of the

novel being set in Rome. The novel occupies a curious place in Kavanagh's progression; the plot owes more than a little to the foibles and clichés of the eighteenth century novel and Kavanagh's attempt to emulate the individuality of Brontë's Rochester results only in a grumpy hero whose only saving grace is his attachment to Grace. Nevertheless, the book anticipates some of Kavanagh's later and more successful works; much of the book centres on the hero, with Grace either absent or presented through his eyes. At the end of her writing life, Kavanagh turned to male characters at the heart of her novels. Furthermore, however inadequately, it envisages true female independence; Grace's immense inheritance suffices to place her in an invulnerable position which she gives up only from equally independent principle. The dross which surrounds the potentially powerful ideas suggests that Kavanagh could more profitably - in terms of quality - have produced a single volume work.

While Kavanagh persisted in her elaborations of the Jane Eyre theme through *Daisy Burns* and *Grace Lee*, tastes were changing slowly. Brontë, who had herself drifted markedly away from that particular model even while Kavanagh was quarrying it, died in 1855, and a harder, more socially conscious strain was beginning to appear from the major novelists. Dickens had produced *Bleak House* (1852-3), and *Hard Times* (1854), and *Little Dorrit* was coming out when Kavanagh must have been beginning her next book. Not only that, but a woman, Harriet Beecher Stowe, had produced *Uncle Tom's Cabin* in 1852. It seems to have been a characteristic of Kavanagh's development that she seemed to take some time to absorb and react to influences, but in 1856, she produced her own unexpected contribution to the literature of social distress, with *Rachel Gray*¹²¹. In this uncharacteristic work, she was able to free herself from the elaborate framework of the three-volume novel. That was the stock-in-trade of the big circulating libraries, both Mudie's and his competitors, but since these were aimed at a particular, and well-understood type of reader, who demanded its comforting pattern, it seems reasonable that, in a work falling outside their normal range, she could avoid an uncomfortable conformity.

Rachel Gray, therefore, with its plain seamstress heroine, and its setting in a working-class street of London during the Chartist collapse of the late 1840s, was apparently another change in the

now clearly eccentric career of Kavanagh. On the one hand, the romantic novels had acquired a faithful readership, while, on a parallel course, a more tough-minded, questioning line of works appeared. Kavanagh's novels may have led some readers to the underlying ethos of her non-fiction. Now, her new novel of working-class life adds to a possible view of the timid Irish spinster as a gentle subversive, sparking ideas of independence and a value beyond the limits of domesticity in her readers. Given the comparative failure of her two previous works, it is possible to regard *Rachel Gray* as either cautious or risky, the former in its general similarity to the successful *Madeleine*, and the latter because it deals with the unglamourised lives of the poor. Kavanagh was aware of the commercial risk, as her preface hints, while other writers followed more populist paths; to take the case of her two new competitors already mentioned, Yonge's *The Daisy Chain* and Craik's *John Halifax, Gentleman* both appeared in the year of *Rachel Gray*'s publication.

That said, *Rachel Gray* was clearly intended by Kavanagh, as she admits in her preface, to emulate aspects of *Madeleine*; that too was a single volume, concentrating on a single figure, and without any element of romantic love. In both novels, the eponymous heroine is motivated by charitable impulses at odds with the poverty of her environment. Without pre-empting the specific discussion of *Rachel Gray* in chapter 6, it should be mentioned here that, despite its clear relationship to *Madeleine*, there is evidence that the later novel may have been Kavanagh's most personal - indeed, partly autobiographical - work.

It may be argued that *Rachel Gray*, despite its departure from Kavanagh's expected norms, was not entirely a risk, given the popularity of social-problem works such as *Hard Times*. However, Kavanagh's book was different in nature and purpose; there is no overt attempt to excoriate the iniquities of a system, there is no dramatic resolution for the heroine, and the novel remains rooted within the working class, with such class conflict as appears limited to the conflict between the bigger shopkeepers and the small. The scene in which the novel operates remains unrelievedly drab, and no escape routes are permitted. George Eliot, reviewing the novel in *The Leader*, noted Kavanagh's intention with approval, while criticising the speech patterns she gives her working class

characters. Eliot was later to give *Rachel Gray* the compliment of imitation, using one image, that of Dutch interior painting, in *Adam Bede*.

Kavanagh's next novel, *Adèle: a Tale* (1857) is a triumphant return to her best form, and to her favoured French milieu, although it begins in England, and has several English characters. The French locale may have been adopted partly in response to the adverse criticism of her previous two long novels; however, as a successful professional writer for ten years, Kavanagh could no longer be naive about the profitability of meeting public demand. Certainly, Flaubert's *Mme Bovary* (1856-7) had been a critical success, albeit a controversial one, and France was again an attractive scene in which to set fiction, with Dickens publishing *A Tale of Two Cities* in serial form in his new magazine. What is new, from Kavanagh, is that, in *Adèle*, she tackles the theme of marriage. Shirley Foster has noted that the work contains hints of sexual fear^[13], an observation which, while true, is a somewhat reductionist view of a more complex treatment in which the principal reason for her distress is a loss of freedom. The social environment in England was certainly attuned to such considerations; the first Married Women's Property Act was still a decade away, but a petition had been presented to Parliament in 1856.^[14] Other stirrings among women were becoming apparent; the question of women's employment had joined suffrage and education as the tridentine demands of a burgeoning women's movement, with the opening of the Women's Employment Bureau, in 1857. The *Englishwomen's Journal*, a deliberately campaigning publication, was launched in the same year, under the aegis of the Langham Place Circle^[15]. Of less acceptability to a devout Catholic like Kavanagh was the passage of the Matrimonial Causes Act in the same year; despite its bias towards men, who could get a divorce on the grounds of adultery, while women could only do so on grounds of aggravated adultery, it offered the first faint hint of freedom, at least for those who could afford it.

With *Adèle*, and with *A Summer and Winter in the Two Sicilies* published in the same year, Kavanagh was once more critically accepted, though the currents of literary fashion were about to move away from her. That is not to say that she ceased to write well, or to maintain a devoted readership, but whereas the Julia Kavanagh who produced *Nathalie* was writing works of a nature that attracted serious critical attention, so that Percy Fitzgerald, writing in 1913^[16], could recall her

as a respectable writer whose books were discussed at dinner parties, the later Kavanagh was, in her longer fiction at least, writing only well-crafted but now slightly predictable works. With the demise of Brontë, the most important woman novelist was to be George Eliot; actually some three years older than Kavanagh. Eliot's career was about to build on the auspicious beginning of *Scenes From Clerical Life* (1857), to produce *Adam Bede*, in 1859. As mentioned earlier, this work drew in one small aspect on Kavanagh's *Rachel Gray*, but the ambition and scope of Eliot's work was to dominate much of the next decade, as a counterpoise to Dickens, and then unchallenged for a further decade.

Other attitudes were about to change in the world that Kavanagh took for granted; 1859 saw also the publication of Darwin's *Origin of Species*, though it was to be 15 years before Kavanagh was to satirise this assault on her Christian beliefs in her penultimate novel, *John Dorrien*, where the villain, Oliver Black, is a devoted Darwinian. In 1860, however, Kavanagh chose to seek her inspiration in her past, turning to her years in Paris for a three-volume collection of short stories (though the title story falls between a novella and a short novel) *Seven Years and Other Tales*. Although no mention appears in the collection, one story, "An Excellent Opportunity", had already appeared in *Household Words*, and probably bears some editing by W H Wills, the sub-editor, according to the office records. Although Dickens knew Kavanagh (she is mentioned in a letter from Dickens to the French publisher Hachette in 1856) this is the first of only two known occasions when she wrote for one of Dickens' magazines.

It must be remarked that Kavanagh as a writer of short stories is often very different from Kavanagh as novelist. The subject matter of all the stories in *Seven Years* is the poor and the petty bourgeoisie of Paris, and Kavanagh displays both a sympathy for, and understanding of, her subjects, which more than hints at a close knowledge of such conditions. That familiarity with the life of the poor tends to make George Eliot's strictures on *Rachel Gray* more than a little suspect, except in the purely technical area of reproduction of working-class speech patterns. The title story of *Seven Years* sets an orphan girl's romance with an upholsterer against a background of deepening poverty and duty as the young woman postpones her marriage for the seven years of the title to look

after the formerly rich old woman who had befriended her, as well as the old lady's equally elderly and gradually enfeebled two servant women. In length, the story again emphasises, in its comparative clarity of narrative, the way in which Kavanagh, except in her best work, was often forced into repetitious or irrelevant incident by the demands of the three-volume novel. Other aspects of her writing come out much more clearly than in the novels, particularly a sharp sense of humour for the foibles, petty vanities and joys of ordinary people. The cramped and dirty tenements and courts of the poor, and the social pretensions of the middle classes are portrayed with the clear eye of one who knows them intimately, and we have, perhaps, as much involuntary evidence as we are likely to get of one phase of Kavanagh's youthful life in France.

In a year in which Dickens produced *David Copperfield* and Eliot *The Mill on the Floss*, it was, perhaps, as well that Kavanagh was not competing as a novelist; instead, as Eliot added *Silas Marner* (1861) to make herself unchallengeably the most important woman writer of her day, Kavanagh again was reaching both into her past and beyond it. A decade as a professional writer had led her to some contemplation of the nature of novels and the novelist's art, as occasional comments in her works betray; Madeleine Guérin, in Kavanagh's first novel, may have been all but illiterate, but her successors increasingly have wider reading tastes. To Kavanagh's surmised exposure to an older generation of English literature, postulated earlier, there was added an early experience of French literature. These channels, with Kavanagh's deep convictions about the influence of women in an earlier epoch, finally came together in a substantial and still valuable project, the two volumes of *French Women of Letters* (1862) and the two companion volumes of *English Women of Letters* of 1863. These were not, of course, the first such biographical sketches; Scott had produced several short essays, some of which were on women writers, and Anne Elwood's *Memoirs of the Literary Ladies of England* had been published a year before Kavanagh's first return to England, in 1843. Elwood's work may well have been familiar to Kavanagh, and indeed, for her English selection of novelists (all her "Women of Letters" are, in fact primarily novelists), she chooses a list only slightly different from that of Elwood. What is different about Kavanagh's work is that, interwoven in her individual biographical sketches, there is a consciously shaped analysis of

what she claims as a specifically feminine tradition of novel writing, manifesting itself in different ways across the French and English literary cultures, but nevertheless definable, and above all, valuable.

By the time the *Women of Letters* volumes were all published, though in a very different way, George Eliot was making her own implicit claim for feminine intellectual rigour, with her deeply researched, but ultimately disappointing *Romola*, in 1863. While Eliot looked to the past for her inspiration, however, Kavanagh the novelist was producing a contemporary story, with *Queen Mab* ^[17]. She had now published seven volumes in the two years 1862-63, four of them obviously the result of considerable research, yet *Queen Mab* is a further successful work. Set in England and Ireland, it takes the eponymous heroine from small foundling to married woman, but it is significantly different in approach to Kavanagh's earlier workings of the same theme, since the sub-plot of the guilty struggles of John Brown, the man who takes her into his family, provides a constant counterpoint. If Kavanagh's earlier career had shown her absorbing and modifying popular themes and genres from other writers, she now seems, either consciously or unconsciously, to be adapting the techniques of others. In this instance, the way her counterpointed sub-plot is managed suggests a debt to Dickens. That impression is further enhanced by the presence of echoes of some of other typically Dickensian techniques; the opening scenes of the poverty-stricken family and the run-down house, with its single richly furnished room that hides knowledge of their fall from the invalid wife, is a very Dickensian device. The relationship between Brown and his wife is free from romanticism, and Kavanagh explores their blighted misconceptions of each other to great effect. Some of the workings-out of the plot to prevent Mab from ever learning of her inheritance also suggest that Kavanagh had taken note of techniques employed by Wilkie Collins, whose *Woman in White* had appeared in 1860.

However, if some parts of Kavanagh's approach are new, the figure of the man Mab eventually marries is a familiar derivative of Brontë's Rochester, an Irishman who prides himself on the rigour of his will. The generation of writers who had been influential at the start of Kavanagh's career were, though she did not know it, in the final phases of their lives; all the Brontës were dead,

and in the year after *Queen Mab*, Elizabeth Gaskell's last, unfinished novel would be published. Dickens, too would have only one completed novel to come, *Our Mutual Friend*. From this point, Kavanagh must have begun to seem, for those of her contemporaries who were concerned with new developments in the novel, to be of a past generation, though she was only 40. That did not mean that she no longer sold to the faithful readers she had gained.^[18] As with many reputations which begin to fade, the truth is slightly more complex. In her next novel, *Beatrice*, in 1865, there are changes, though there remains the now familiar extensive treatment of the childhood of the heroine. For the first time in her 18 previous volumes of novels - 19½ if the long "Seven Years" is included - Kavanagh's heroine retains one parent, her mother. Furthermore, the love story is between a couple of more equal age than in the earlier works, though Gilbert is a teenager while Beatrice is a child. These, however, are changes which probably reflect Kavanagh's internal life. The novel sees a conscious widening of the literature which Kavanagh was mining for her ideas. The claustrophobic setting of Carnoosie, the country house of which Beatrice Gordon becomes mistress at an early age, and the malevolent manipulative genius of her stepfather, Mr. Gervoise, had contemporary origins; Kavanagh was now, in her characteristic way, adding the grist of Collins' *Woman in White* to her mill, with her own domesticated Fosco. She also makes use, however, of authors long out of public consciousness. Her one direct allusion is to Mrs Radcliffe's *Mysteries of Udolpho*, and one can also detect, at a remove, recyclings of some elements of Charlotte Smith's *The Old Manor House*, both authors Kavanagh had covered in *English Women of Letters*, two years before. Yet this is unmistakably a contemporary work - from Carnoosie, it is possible for two of the characters to be on the French shore within three hours. It is an eclectic mixture of influences, but a reflection of the uneven developments of Kavanagh's turbulent times; alongside the steamers and railways, the villain employs a chef whose subsidiary skill is to bleed him for apoplexy. (This latter is not ignorance on Kavanagh's part - the "humour" theory of medicine, on which the practice of bloodletting was based, had finally been undermined only in 1858, by Virchow's *Die Cellular-Physiologie* (Berlin, 1858)).

If Kavanagh was moving into the literary shadowland of familiarity, however, she was, at long last, becoming confident enough to trade on the reputation she had established. From now on, her careful sifting of the successes of others appears to have diminished sharply. With her next novel, *Sybil's Second Love*^[19], the young heroine again has a parent, and a comfortable home in France. It is, on the evidence of this novel and its successors, possible that, from about this time, Kavanagh and her mother had returned to live in France. Not only is it almost wholly set there, as was to be a substantial element of later novels, but it introduces as a secondary element a portrait of a small British emigré community and its social niceties. A striking feature of the novel is the growing realisation of the weakness of Sybil Kennedy's father, and the comparative strength of his friend. It is one of two parallel elements in the story in which the young Sybil learns the truth behind the façade presented by other people; the other is Blanche Cain, her adored but fortune-seeking friend.

The novel was followed rapidly by *Dora*^[20], in which Kavanagh's heroine Dora Courtenay begins her life poor in Ireland, but moves rapidly to short-lived wealth in England and poverty in France. In some respects, it is a mature reworking of themes in the unsuccessful *Grace Lee*. In this later work, the extremes of poverty and wealth are minimised, the backgrounds are surer, and the backgrounds and difficult relationship with the man the heroine marries are more realistically handled. *Dora* also sees another sharp portrait of a familiar Kavanagh figure, the manipulative and uncaring woman, in this instance Florence Gale, this time set beside that of another determined and ruthless older woman, Dora's aunt, Mrs Luan, who will do anything - when Dora is poor - to avoid her attachment to her son John. Although both novels have a better narrative structure than some of her early works, the persistence of these elements suggests that Kavanagh was lapsing into a formula, an impression somewhat reinforced by the rapid succession of books.

Certainly, Kavanagh's next work, *Sylvia*^[21] had a slightly longer gestation period, and she appears to have taken some pains to distinguish it from its two predecessors. Its young heroine, Silvia Nardi, is Italian, and is first encountered in Sorrento in much the surroundings of Kavanagh and her mother in the opening chapters of *A Summer and Winter in the Two Sicilies*. The shift

allows Kavanagh to give the young woman some of the characteristics of two of her more successful heroines, Adèle and Nathalie; she is, like the former, of an old and proud family, though with only a small income, and like the latter, allowed the pride and spirit of the Southerner. By various devices, the young woman is placed in the sort of expatriate English community in France that Kavanagh had begun to write about. In summary, the plot elements are disparate but familiar from her other works, but are handled with some care, so that the oddity of the mix is not immediately obvious. The characters include yet another manipulative woman in Lady John, who seeks to get the attractive young woman out of her household, and an unexpectedly fraudulent older woman who forges a will. The plot includes, but is not dominated by, a number of more sensational ones including an attack by wolves and a vicious and cunning would-be murderer. Kavanagh goes to the extreme - for her - of having Silvie grazed by a bullet. At the same time, her nicely observed comedy of social manners is woven in fairly seamlessly. It is, however, an entertainment, no more, with none of the reflectiveness that marks Kavanagh's best works.

Unexpectedly, Kavanagh's next novel, *Bessie*^[22] marks a deliberate attempt to produce something different from her earlier works. Bessie Carr is the narrator, a change from Kavanagh's normal third person narrative, and, although her own love story is an element of the novel, it is, until the story is well advanced, a comparatively minor one. She tells the story of her seventeenth to her twentieth year from the standpoint of middle age, giving Kavanagh the opportunity for much comedy about this bright, observant, but naive girl, at sea as she observes the complex relationships of four people, her sarcastic, domineering guardian, his sister-in-law, the proud and secretive Elizabeth whom he believes to be the widow of his drowned son, and a young artist in love with Elizabeth. The novel, like *Daisy Burns* and *Dora*, makes some use of the art world, particularly around Fontainebleau where the first two volumes are set. Of particular interest, however, is the character of Elizabeth, vengeful, manipulative, yet, within her own lights, honest and moral unlike Kavanagh's earlier manipulative female characters, suggesting that the author was, in middle age, beginning to take a more lenient view.

After *Bessie*, there occurred what was to prove the longest gap in Kavanagh's writing career. It was to be three years before she published *John Dorrien* (London, Hurst and Blackett, 1875). In many ways, this work is an archetypal Kavanagh romance, starting in England with the portrait of a child in poverty-stricken circumstances, before moving to France for the bulk of the novel. The book offers one unusual innovation for Kavanagh in its use of the eponymous male protagonist. Whatever the reason, Kavanagh's confidence in her ability to handle a central masculine sensibility appears to have grown steadily. At the age of 51, and thirty years after she decided to take up the profession of letters, she could, no doubt, allow herself to be rather more robust than would have been seemly for a young woman at the mid-point of the century. Although she was always able to deal happily with older men, particularly in a mildly satirical mode, she had bundled Madeleine Guérin's fiancé out of the novel within the first chapter, and, even in *Nathalie, de Sainville* is both a model of propriety and seen largely through the heroine's eyes. His nephew is guilty of invading Nathalie's privacy in a garden, and subsequently in a summerhouse, offences which, however contrary to polite rules of society, were bound to be more discomfiting to the naive young writer of 24 than to many of her readers. Now, however, there were ample examples of writers entering imaginatively into the psyche of the opposite sex; *Madame Bovary* was eighteen years old, the real identity of the author of *Adam Bede*, *Silas Marner*, and *Felix Holt* was no secret, and Hardy's *Far from the Madding Crowd* centered round Bathsheba.

In addition, the most gross of the distinctions between the life of women and men were beginning to crumble; the first women students' residence had opened in Cambridge in 1871, a girl's public day school in 1873, and a women's medical school in 1874. Those able to profit by these changes remained few, but, for the first time, the possibility of a commonality of experience between the lives of men and women in Britain had begun to open up. With that possibility, even a "safe", respectable writer like Kavanagh could feel little inhibition about exploring the psychology of a young man. There were, however, special factors in her case which make the attempt interesting. Right up to *English Women of Letters* in 1863, Kavanagh had promoted the idea of a distinct set of feminine values which women writers had brought to, among other fields, the novel. That idea had,

of course, a converse; there had, by definition, to be a set of masculine values against which those feminine ones could be discerned. By that definition, it must be admitted that Kavanagh fails her own test. She strives - one is tempted to use the adverb "manfully" - to place her hero in a business environment, but *John Dorrien* has a very similar sensibility, in many ways, to Kavanagh's earlier heroines. It is, indeed, easy to detect, in the frail, invalid child in the opening chapters, with his ugly face and beautiful eyes, an alter ego of Kavanagh herself, if we add together the pen pictures of her contributed by Charlotte Brontë on the one hand, and C.W.Wood on the other.

One element of *John Dorrien* which offers a small sidelight on the literary world in which Kavanagh had moved with success for a quarter of a century at this time is in his mother's attitude when the young man, reared in a world of academic values divorced from the harsh realities of earning a living, assumes that his juvenile blank verse epic on Miriam the Jewess will be seized on by publishers. In her treatment of this, one can see the cool realism of a writer well used to the commercial realities of her profession, tinged, perhaps, with a mild amazement at the temerity of her twenty-year-old self.

Nevertheless, that temerity still existed, and Kavanagh once more took an unexpected step with her next book. For the first time since her first publication, *The Three Paths*, in 1848, Kavanagh produced a children's book, *The Pearl Fountain*,^[23] a collection of fairy stories. It is difficult to assess this in relation to Kavanagh's other works, however, because it is credited to Bridget and Julia Kavanagh, the mother's name taking precedence. Some difficulty arises, not simply in discerning the relative contributions of the two women, but from an uncertainty about Bridget Kavanagh's capacity. Charlotte Brontë had judged her to be feeble-minded a quarter of a century earlier, but there is no other evidence for this, possibly cursory, response. We do know that, at the time of Kavanagh's death less than two years later, Mrs Kavanagh was effectively blind. There may have been other factors in the invalidity ascribed to the older woman, but her ability to donate a portrait of her daughter to the National Gallery of Ireland suggests that she was not substantially intellectually impaired. Kavanagh and her mother collaborated only on this single occasion - so far as we know - and the nature of the work suggests that Bridget Kavanagh's

contribution may well have derived from an Irish oral tradition. There is a robust grimness in some of the stories which suggests a different sensibility to Julia's at work, but with only one other children's work by Kavanagh to compare *The Pearl Fountain* with (and that written 28 years earlier), there are inadequate bases for separating out the contribution of Julia and her mother on stylistic grounds. Perhaps the most likely hypothesis is that the stories were predominantly the work of the mother, with her daughter contributing her literary skills to the finished production.

Unexpected as *The Pearl Fountain* was in Kavanagh's career, it filled an acknowledged market niche. Fairy stories were, by this time, a staple of Victorian children's fiction, as it moved on from its didactic aims at the beginning of the century, and it was possible to achieve a thriving career within the field of children's books, as exemplified by the career of Mrs Margaret Gatty (1809-73) and her daughter, Mrs Julia Horatia Ewing (1841-85).^[24] Nor, of course, was children's literature thought unfit for the talents of serious adult writers; Charles Luttwidge Dodgson ("Lewis Carroll") (1832-98) was a mathematician of repute, and the success of *Alice Through the Looking Glass* in 1871 would not have gone unrecognised by Kavanagh. A further example was Charles Kingsley, with *The Water Babies* (1863).

With *Two Lilies*^[25] (1877), we reach Kavanagh's final completed work. It is, in many ways, a typical Kavanagh work, though it continues her new interest in making the central character masculine. Once more, the action flits between London, the Home Counties, and Kavanagh's beloved Normandy coast. Her technique had taken no very significant steps for a decade or more, yet there are developments in her confidence and control in handling her material. At the beginning of her career, Kavanagh had more than once taken her reader up blind alleys of narrative, introducing people and places which do not advance her story in any way. With *Two Lilies*, however, she is fully the mistress of the ponderous three-decker, and even the most minor characters are fitted neatly into her plotting. The title reflects the comfortable accommodation with her literary skills she has reached at this point in her career, since the hero must, eventually, choose between two young women of that name. Kavanagh must have been fully aware of the resonances of the word "lily" for her readership, the ideal of purity in womanhood, combined with connotations of

ornamental uselessness, and enjoyed the slow realisation of the prosaic reality of the title as it dawned on her readers. There are, of course, some of Kavanagh's slightly outdated commentaries on public taste, in the hero's attempt to reform domestic architecture in England, which reminds one uncomfortably of Dickens' parody of domestic Gothic with Wemmick's house in *Great Expectations*, 17 years earlier. At the same time, the expatriate English community of the novel, which she had first attempted in *Sybil's Second Love*, is vividly realised.

Despite this, however, it is difficult to identify this last complete novel with any changes in public taste. It is tempting to conclude that, at last, Kavanagh felt sure enough of her life to write what was simply a Kavanagh book, finally discarding her slowly diminishing need to examine the entrails of the literary market place. It may also be that she was simply tired, though this is not reflected in *Two Lilies*. For her last work, she appears to have planned something which would allow her to re-use many of the short stories she had produced over the years, fitting them into a framework in which they could be told by a contentedly observant spinster in a small Normandy town. For the apparatus of this story, which remained unwritten apart from a few opening paragraphs, we have only the evidence - clearly set out in a way which gives the lie to Charlotte Brontë's intimations of feeble-mindedness - of Bridget Kavanagh, as outlined to C.W.Wood. Even the title, *Forget-Me-Nots*, seems to be the invention of Wood, or the publisher. From the quotation marks placed around the phrase, it seems likely that "Leaves From an Old Maid's Book" was, at least, Kavanagh's working sub-title.

The stories themselves, largely focused on Normandy in particular, and French rural life in general, as her *Seven Years* collection focused on the life of the Parisian poor, display a warmth and love for the culture they portray which is pushed to the margins of the novels, though many of the familiar themes of the novels are there. It seems highly likely that Kavanagh's intention was to use only her Manneville stories in the collection, perhaps rewriting them to further bring together this microcosm of rural Normandy she had produced over the years, but the demands of the three-volume work mean that it contains other stories which do not readily fit. Like *Two Lilies*, however, there is a sense, in the Manneville group of stories, that, at the end of her career, Kavanagh felt herself free

of the commercial constraints which make her writings such a reflection of the changing literary tastes of Britain during the third quarter of the nineteenth century.

Whatever the accommodations with literary fashion that Kavanagh had to make in her working life, the many echoes of the innovations of others recorded in this chapter were not mere simple imitations, but were adapted to her own consistent sensibility, and, as recorded in Chapter 1, made her reasonably successful financially.

Notes

- [1] Although such a conjecture must be highly speculative - we have only a single, perhaps flattering portrait and Charlotte Brontë's record of their meeting - it cannot be discounted that Julia Kavanagh may have suffered mildly from a genetic condition of restricted growth. The Chanet portrait shows a woman with a head which appears unusually long and narrow, in proportion to the distance from chin to waist.
- [2] Kavanagh, Morgan Peter, *The Discovery of the Science of Language, on which are shown, the real nature of the parts of speech, the meaning which all words carry in themselves as their own definition, and the origins of words, letters, figures, etc. Translated into French by MC at C Joubert* (Paris, 1844) *DNB* describes this work as "ridiculous".
- [3] Kavanagh, Morgan Peter *The Hobbies: A Novel* (London, Newby, 1857).
- [4] (London, Smith, Elder, 1850)
- [5] (London, Smith, Elder, 1852)
- [6] (London, Hurst and Blackett, 1861)
- [7] (London, Hurst and Blackett, [1862]1863)
- [8] Anonymous (London, Chambers, 1846)
- [9] (London, Bentley, 1848)
- [10] Kavanagh, Julia (trans. Mme. H Loreau) *Tuteur et Pupille* (Paris, 1860)

- [11] Sutherland, John, 'Victorian Novelists: a survey' in *Critical Quarterly*, vol. 30, no. 1, pp.51-61.
- [12] Kavanagh, Julia, *Rachel Gray: a tale founded on fact* (London, Hurst and Blackett, 1856)
- [13] Foster, Shirley, *Victorian Women's Fiction: Marriage, Freedom and the Individual* (London & Sydney, Croom Helm, 1985)
- [14] A useful discussion of these issues is in Banks, Joseph A., *Victorian Values: Secularism and the size of Families* (London & Boston, Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1981) pp. 31-45, particularly p. 36.
- [15] Kavanagh appears to have had some sympathy with the Langham Place Circle; they were responsible for the Society for the Promotion of Employment for Women, and, as part of this, established the Victoria Press under Emily Faithfull. When the Press published the *Victoria Regia* in 1861 to demonstrate the skills of their women compositors, Kavanagh contributed a free story, "John's Five Pound Note".
- [16] Fitzgerald, Percy, *Memories of Charles Dickens* (Bristol, 1913) p. 276
- [17] Kavanagh, Julia *Queen Mab: A Novel* (London, Hurst and Blackett, 1863)
- [18] Indeed, the titles of the three stories in *The Gift* (London, Derby (printed), 1863), by Mrs James W. Kavanagh suggests that the author, the wife of the Irish educationalist, may have been hoping for some confusion of identity with the popular novelist who had identified herself with Catholicism, France, and novels with eponymous heroines: they were "Agnes, the daughter of Vincent de Paul"; "The Englishman in Italy"; and "A Doctor's Story of the Reign of Terror. If so, it hints at the popularity and commercial success of Kavanagh at this time.
- [19] Kavanagh, Julia, *Sybil's Second Love* (London, Hurst and Blackett, 1867) 3 vols.
- [20] Kavanagh, Julia, *Dora* (London, Hurst and Blackett, 1868) 3 vols.
- [21] Kavanagh, Julia, *Silvia* (London, Hurst and Blackett, 1870) 3 vols.
- [22] Kavanagh, Julia, *Bessie* (London, Hurst and Blackett, 1872) 3 vols.
- [23] Kavanagh, Bridget, and Julia Kavanagh, *The Pearl Fountain* (London, Hurst & Blackett, 1876)
- [24] A brief survey of this field appears in Ousby, Ian (ed.) *The Cambridge Guide to Literature in English* (Cambridge, CUP, 1988) pp. 172-173.
- [25] Kavanagh, Julia, *Two Lilies* (London, Hurst and Blackett, 1877) 3 vols.

Chapter 3: The Female Tradition

In her own time, Kavanagh was principally known as a novelist, but a very substantial part of her importance today derives from the series of non-fiction works that explored the theme of women's political, moral and philosophical contribution to their society. These books were noticeably less tailored to the requirements of her readership than the novels. All but one, her travel book, *A Winter and Summer in the Two Sicilies*, trace the growth of a personal theory on the role that women had played up to her own time, and the influence, for both good and ill, which such activities had had. This is not to suggest that Kavanagh had at the outset, any master plan to promote her views; rather, the four works themselves give every indication that her theoretical standpoint was developed in the course of writing them.

It should be said that, for the most part, the arguments put forward by Kavanagh in her non-fiction works find little place in her fiction. However, Kavanagh's first novel, *Madeleine: A Tale of Auvergne, founded on fact* (London, 1848) is a significant exception to this general observation. In part, this may well have been because the work is based loosely on the achievements and early life of Jeanne Jugan, the real-life foundress of the order of the Little Sisters of the Poor. Though Kavanagh displaced the action in both time and place - from the coast of populous Brittany to the remoter valleys of the Auvergne and four decades back, she is concerned - occasionally to the detriment of the novel - to highlight what, to her, were the significant elements of Jugan's story^[1].

These elements correspond closely to characteristics which Kavanagh increasingly sought to identify as the positive contribution of women to society and its outlook in the works which are the primary subject of this chapter^[2]. This chapter considers principally *Woman in France in the Eighteenth Century*, (London, 1850) and *Women of Christianity*, (London, 1852). The later two

works, *French Women of Letters: Biographical Sketches* (London, 1862) and *English Women of Letters: Biographical Sketches* (London, 1863) are separately considered in the next chapter, since they fulfil a dual role, completing Kavanagh's consideration of the role of women, and adding a context to her theoretical values as a novelist.

Within these four works, Kavanagh develops a coherent theme of the relationship between purposeful women and the societies which offered them no formal locus for influencing those societies. This was by no means a universally welcome message, even among women, since they stood in danger of being branded unfeminine. At the root of Kavanagh's thesis, however, lay the proposition that the influence some outstanding women could yield was qualitatively distinct from that of men. Though such a message was, for example, less than wholly acceptable to Charlotte Brontë, whose view was that women were capable of making the same contribution as men, it offered some advantages. It reduced the element of threat to the established order while allowing the claim to stand. To what extent this approach was based on such considerations is uncertain; all knowledge of Kavanagh suggests that she herself fully believed in her premise. Nevertheless, she was clearly aware of the resistance even such a limited approach would have, as she makes clear in the opening remarks of *Woman in France*.

In the broadest sense, what these works have in common is a celebration of the thesis of a positive influence by women's thought and example. This degree of common purpose does not mean that the four books are wholly integrated in the message they carry. Two factors suggest why this did not happen, and explain some of the differences in approach and tone which can be discerned. Firstly, they fall into two distinct groups; *Woman in France* and *Women of Christianity* were written at the beginning of Kavanagh's career; the latter two works were not written for another decade, when Kavanagh had gained experience and reflected further.^[3]

The second point which needs to be kept in mind throughout is that each of the works represented an area of considerable personal interest to Kavanagh. We have no personal comment by Kavanagh expressing her love of France, but it is implicit in almost everything she wrote, and we know that she returned, in the last years of her life at least, to live in Nice, where she and her mother

conversed in French; even her last words were in that language. We can, therefore, have little doubt that the expressions of admiration which are so often on the lips of her fictional characters were shared by their creator. On that basis, *Woman in France* is a work devoted to the traditions and history of a country Kavanagh loved.

Similarly, *Women of Christianity* is the reflection of the strong Catholic faith that supported Kavanagh throughout her life. Finally, when she came to write the companion works of *Women of Letters*, she was reflecting in part on the upbringing and influences that led her to choose a career in letters at the age of 20, as well as saluting the generations of women who had made such a choice possible. It is therefore to be expected that each of those works will be written in the framework of the personal meaning that its context had for the author; these dictate approach, language and attitude, giving each of the works its own distinctive flavour. At the same time, we have the developing thrust of Kavanagh's exploration of the theme of women's influence providing a common thread. The result is that the works carry a conviction *en masse* which goes beyond their individual impact.

I have suggested that *Madeleine* is, in part, a fictional extension of Kavanagh's theme of influence. If this is so, it argues that the basis of the concept was clearly established in Kavanagh's mind at the beginning of her career, and might have been more clearly expressed in fictional form had not Kavanagh been so overwhelmingly influenced by Brontë's *Jane Eyre*. Publication dates suggest that Kavanagh must have begun work on *Woman in France* almost immediately after completing *Madeleine*, and the close succession of the two, both carrying the same implicit message, is indicative of a very strong conviction on Kavanagh's part. She must also have been aware that it was a controversial line to take. For more reactionary readers, even in its most rudimentary form, the thesis of a consistent pattern of political and social influence which Kavanagh began to develop in this book was wholly unacceptable. The *Quarterly Review* ^[4] found the non-fiction prong of Kavanagh's attack sufficiently alarming to mount a major review of *Woman in France in the Eighteenth Century* in which it was compared unfavourably with a memoir by the Duc de Noailles. The review is very full, remarkably so for an author producing her first non-fiction work, and with

only two novels - however well-received - to her credit. It is, however, largely used as a basis by the anonymous reviewer, for arguing his own views, and there are several criticisms of, for example, what the writer perceives as Kavanagh's lack of sympathy for Marie Antoinette. The heart of the *Quarterly's* disdain is, however, revealed in the opening pages:

This lady is evidently unwilling to make herself the apologist of error; but her biographical partialities mislead her, and her desire to establish the supremacy of her sex has induced her to invest her heroines, their age, and their country, with a brilliancy for which facts afford no warrant, and by which the cause of morality suffers. In the annals of well-governed states the influence of women will be little traced; and it might be presumed that its direct bearing on public affairs must be in exact proportion to the corruption and disorganisation of society. (p. 352).

Indeed, in his eagerness to undermine Kavanagh's premise, the reviewer places himself in an untenable position; throughout the review, he alternates between denying that women had exerted significant influence, and claiming that their influence was harmful. Such commentary had, and has, little relevance to Kavanagh's *Woman in France* as literature, but it does argue either a certain naiveté or a degree of determination on the part of the young author. To reach a conclusion as to which, one needs to refer to the work itself.

Kavanagh opens *Woman in France* with a clear statement of what she intended to demonstrate. Establishing her credentials immediately with a list of over ninety authors consulted, the majority of whom are French, and in many cases contemporary memoirs of the 18th century, she opens with a statement that leaves no doubt of her premise:

In times still recent, in a nation celebrated for its power and greatness, and in an age which gave to thought a vast and magnificent, even though perilous, development, a series of most remarkable women exercised a power so extensive, and yet so complete, as to be unparalleled in the history of their sex.^[5]

There could, after such an opening, be no doubt of Kavanagh's contention for the influence of her sex. The second sentence does, however, give an indication of the parameters that Kavanagh is setting for the sphere of influence of her chosen subjects. After claiming that they "exercised" a

power, she begins to chart the roles through which they were able to operate. They “give the tone” to the ways their chosen milieus work, whether in society, literature or politics; all their influence is clearly indirect, and there is no hint that Kavanagh is uncomfortable with such a situation. Her thesis is therefore at once audacious and inherently conservative.

Only in a single instance is there a possibility of direct activity - the world of letters - which was both Kavanagh’s own chosen career and the seed that was later to become *French Women of Letters*. Kavanagh is, of course, able to provide a substantial amount of evidence for the activity and influence of women writers prior to her own generation, but there remains an intriguing set of possibilities in respect of her motives. Her choice of career, like that of many other Victorian women writers, may have been largely determined by the fact that a rare avenue existed for a female career. Nevertheless, the consciousness she displays of the history of literature and particularly of the female contribution suggests at least the possibility of other motivations. She could have maintained a steady role as a novelist; that she chose to diversify so early in her career raises the implication that Kavanagh was not only exploring the topic of women’s influence, but also, whether consciously or not, exercising it, in writing *Woman in France* and its successors.

Such a possibility is made the more intriguing because, having stated her premise, Kavanagh goes on to raise the question whether women’s influence was always for the good. She remarks that “This power was not always pure and good; it was often corrupt in its source, evil and fatal in its results; but it was power.”^[6] The possibility that Kavanagh was naive about the reception of her central idea can be clearly discounted; she goes on to remark that “Though the historians of the period have never fully or willingly acknowledged its existence (women’s influence), their silence cannot efface that which has been.”

The structure of *Woman in France* is essentially a simple, chronological one. Kavanagh divides her work into four periods; though they are defined by the rule of French monarchs, (from the beginning of the century to the end of the Regency following the death of Louis XIV; the reign of Louis XV; and the reign of Louis XVI) and the Revolution to the end of the century, this is arguably justifiable as more than mere periodicity, since the monarchy dominated the whole of society, and

represented genuine changes in French society. This has the merit of considerable simplicity in terms of understanding the work as history; it does, however, involve a finer balance of advantage and disadvantage in its effect on the development of Kavanagh's central thesis of the existence of a tradition of women's influence; simple chronology rarely provides her with the opportunity to link examples of critical developments. She often has to jump from examples of political influence to others of social influence, and thence to examples of intervention in the arts (though, naturally, such categories were anything but mutually exclusive in practice, particularly in a strongly hierarchical society such as eighteenth century France.) The effect is to give an impression of tenuous connections in individual areas of activity, where there is no clear line of succession of influence.

Nevertheless, the chronological approach produces some countervailing benefits, because it simultaneously creates a sense of a continuing thread of influence on a more general level, albeit one which shows its effects erratically across different spheres of activity throughout the century. The result is that, although the sense of continuity in individual threads of effort is sometimes lacking, there is a strong argument for a broader French tradition that made its mark wherever it could. That tradition is demonstrated to be independent of the various fields in which it operated - literature, philosophy, politics, society etc.; instead it coheres around the one unchanging circumstance that links together all of the individual elements Kavanagh examines. Her argument outlines a consistent pattern of women using whatever opportunities present themselves to make their ideas and talents felt in a society that gave them no formal position of authority.

That is not to say that Kavanagh supports the methods used by all of her subjects; all too often, they were shocking to the ideas of Victorian society. A clear case in point is the woman who, in Kavanagh's eyes, wielded influence over the ageing Louis XIV. Making the point that, during the rule of 'le Roi Soleil', France was entirely governed by the whim of the king, and that therefore the only major locus for influence was through the monarch, she briefly comments on the "highly-born and accomplished, though not very virtuous ladies (who) impressed their own character and spirit on the times in which they lived" as the Royal mistresses.^[7] Her claim is that the mock chivalry of the earlier court was to please the tastes of Mlle. de la Vallière, while the atmosphere of satire and

intrigue which followed was reflective of the character of Mme. de Montespan; the ascetic gloom and religiosity of Louis's final years were the result of the influence of Mme de Maintenon. (It has to be remarked at this early point that, while Kavanagh's argument carries a reasonable force, it is equally arguable that the absolutism of the King was not noticeably amenable to consistent influence, and that he may well have selected mistresses who reflected his own increasingly cynical and then despairing views as he aged. To accept this latter view does not, however, invalidate Kavanagh's main thrust of argument; all these women found themselves in a position to influence events in a way which was agreeable to their own tastes and views by their liaison with the king.)

In these, the opening pages of the first of these volumes exploring the patterns of women's influence, we can detect that Kavanagh is prepared to take a polemical stand on her case; it would be difficult to accept that she failed to be aware of the opposing view of the key point of influence just raised, so that we have to be aware of this throughout these works. She is not, and makes little pretension to be, an unbiased researcher. Kavanagh is, however, at this time making none of the moral claims for the influence of women that developed later in these works. She is concerned only to identify instances of the wielding of power by influential women, and though she is by no means approving of it, she is unflinching when it comes to recording instances when that power was wielded by improper means, or for corrupt purposes. It is tempting to attribute some of this candour which characterised Kavanagh's early work to her French upbringing, in which it was possible to recognise publicly - even when one strongly disapproved of them - activities and attitudes which the pruderies and hypocrisies of Victorian England shrank from. It is true that the later works increasingly stress the influence for good of women, and it may be that this reflects Kavanagh's absorption of English mores. There is, however, no conclusive evidence for this, and we should remember that Kavanagh was skilled at presenting the ethos of particular groups; her Parisian poor in *Seven Years and Other Tales* ^[8] collection of short stories have a very different, more amoral attitude to life than do her (largely Norman) peasantry in *Forget-Me-Nots*. ^[9] This has nothing to do with their dates of publication; both were collections of work written over a number of years, and many of the stories were first published in magazines.

A brief summary of the scope of the opening chapters gives an indication of the nature of Kavanagh's work as history, as well as an indication of her sympathies. Despite Mme de Maintenon's status as Royal mistress, which Kavanagh treats with a brisk and matter-of-fact, though condemnatory fashion which is unexpected in a young and unmarried Victorian woman in her mid-twenties, her asceticism and moral influence on the King are the stuff of which one would expect a devout Catholic like Kavanagh to approve. Instead, she shows little sympathy. There is evidence elsewhere - notably in the treatment of Rose Montolieu, a passive and self-abnegating young woman with a strongly ascetic religious faith in her novel *Nathalie: a Tale*,^[10] which Kavanagh was almost certainly working on at the same time as *Woman in France* - that Kavanagh's attitude to religious asceticism was ambivalent, a theoretical admiration at odds with a repugnance for some of its aspects. That it has been suggested with some persuasiveness that the character of Rose Montolieu has some autobiographical aspects adds to the complexity of Kavanagh's attitude.

^[11] What is clear is that Kavanagh had no strong regard for Mme de Maintenon.

She is, however, severe on others, often despite her own clear predilections; her resumé of the last days of Louis XIV deals with the coterie established by the daughters-in-law of the King, including the wives of his legitimised sons. Some of them supported literary and philosophical salons, or themselves took to literary pursuits. All of these activities are directly to Kavanagh's own tastes, yet she has no hesitation in concluding where necessary that, influential though they were, the activities of these women were often shallow, arising from the ennui of a court paralysed by protocol, or merely as a way of promoting one faction over another. A clear example lies in Kavanagh's treatment of the "Society of Sceaux", the group of writers, artists and philosophers gathered around her by Louise- Bénédicte, Duchess of Maine. Clever, well-educated and an excellent conversationalist, Mme de Maine gathered round her a brilliant assembly, including the young M. Arouet, yet to adopt his identity of 'Voltaire'. To all this, Kavanagh gives due weight, but she sums up her subject without hesitation as "bold, active and vehement, but deficient in moral courage" (v.1, p. 50).

Kavanagh reinforces her case by a reflection on the women who were at the centre of each of the factions in the dying days of Louis XIV's reign. She argues that the paralysis which affected the great men of France as the old king stubbornly resisted change did, paradoxically, allow women to operate with greater freedom of a sort, repugnant though it is to Kavanagh:

The men, deprived of political rights, used their female friends as the means of their ambition. Indirect power is immoral: when exercised by women, it is still more so. At the times of which we speak, a spirit of ambition and intrigue, not pure in its origin or purely exercised, seemed to have seized on the whole sex (Vol. 1, p. 10).

Despite the deadening influence of Victorian euphemism, there is no doubt what Kavanagh means, and she makes it clear by her use of a very Victorian stricture: "When women fall, they fall deeper than men, because the only sense of honour allowed them by society departs, if once the purity of their lives is tainted."

One minor woman at the court of Louis XIV she betrays a certain bemused affection for is Mlle de la Chausserie, who, in some ways was as obscure and apparently helpless as many of Kavanagh's fictional heroines, and quite as determined as they. Kavanagh remains disappointed in her, because she apparently had no very strong motives, though her activities seem to have been benign. Nevertheless, as a woman "without rank, wealth or beauty" (again the model of many Kavanagh heroines) she managed to thwart many of Mme de Maintenon's schemes, by a façade of naive simplicity through which she influenced the king, for example, when she changed his mind about arresting a Jansenist Cardinal. Kavanagh quotes without comment de la Chausserie's admission, in later life, that "the mental exertion necessary to maintain this constant dissimulation often left her overpowered with fatigue."^[12] Kavanagh refers to this character in only three short paragraphs, but her selection of such a minor figure is suggestive. Not only are there the comparisons with some of Kavanagh's fictional characters already mentioned, but de la Chausserie is, in some ways, an archetypal figure in *Woman in France*, and, in part, highlights a rarely raised, but always present subtext to all Kavanagh's works on the subject. In order to achieve what she did, the Frenchwoman was forced to adopt a persona of stupidity, simply because anything else would

have been unacceptable and ineffective to the man she was influencing, and indeed to all the powerful men of the time. Kavanagh raises no obvious complaints that the position of women was unfair, and that the wholly masculine regime was oppressive and illogical, but as she developed her ideas of a unique contribution by women to society (and by extension one that men had not been able to make), she rarely needed to. Her chosen line of argument remained the positive one of what women had actually done. Negative arguments about the unfairness of the situation, however justified, she eschewed. The idea that de la Chausserie's assumed stupidity enabled her to triumph over the real stupidity of the monarch remains an oblique comment, but her selection of the incident remains telling.

From these scattered comments covering only the earliest pages of the book, it is obvious that it is a densely packed, and very often partial history. Stylistically, that density offers only limited opportunities for extended writing, but the whole has a brisk narrative pace and a clear, lucid expression. It has to be admitted that, though she maintains a lively interest in her subjects, mixed with a certain amount of wit, the knowledge she assumes in her readers of eighteenth century French history was probably excessive (though it is difficult to ascertain what would have been expected of an educated, largely female, readership at that time). It is highly readable, but is neither intended as, nor succeeds in being great literature. Its claim to modern attention has to rest on the skill with which Kavanagh weaves her thesis round the wealth of historical material, with neither message nor narrative suffering in the process. Kavanagh, as a novelist, has been accused of stopping her story dead to point up a moral,^[13] but here the two elements normally reinforce each other.

What remains to be explored in respect of *Woman in France in the Eighteenth Century* is the scope of Kavanagh's examples and arguments, since they draw on the examples of women of a variety of social levels, political persuasions, skills, and attitudes. Naturally, for all but the last part of the work, the highest ranks of society predominate, since the doings of the poor and obscure were then little recorded. Nevertheless, even the less noble elements of society are seen to have at least the potential for influence. Kavanagh, dealing with the execution of Marie Antoinette, quotes, and gives an authority for, a story of the overwhelming desire of her captors to degrade the condemned queen.

To humiliate her, even at this time, they are said to have planned to execute her between two courtesans. The plan was foiled when the two women “degraded as they were . . . declared they would, even on the scaffold and in the face of the people, fall down at the feet of the queen and publicly implore her forgiveness for being compelled to die with her”^[14] According to the story, the two women forced the Queen’s gaolers to abandon their insult. The story has the hallmarks of a romantic fabrication, though one must assume that Kavanagh believed it, or wanted to, since she took the rare step, for her, of quoting her authority in a footnote. Its importance, however, lies not in its truth but as evidence of the strength of Kavanagh’s belief that the capacity for influence lay in all women.

In the last section of the work, dealing with the Revolution, the social scope widens significantly. It is clear that, despite the *Quarterly’s Review’s* qualms, Kavanagh’s personal feelings were not in any way pro-revolutionary in any political sense; the single subject to whom she gives the most unstinting praise is Charlotte Corday, the assassin of the Revolutionary leader Marat. Nevertheless, in its strong reinforcement of a case for a history of influence by women, it was directly contrary to attitudes that were not simply conservative, but predominant in Victorian society. Unfortunately for reactionary temperaments, the way in which Kavanagh presents her case does not allow for easy contradictions, since she asserts little that could otherwise offend established opinion. *Woman in France* is, instead, a recital of instances which, in their width and extent do not allow more than carping about individual examples. If only half of the examples Kavanagh advanced had a basis in fact, then her case is proved.

There are, in the book, no claims for particular benefit or advantage; as Kavanagh makes abundantly clear, the influence of women was as likely to be corrupt, ill-informed or aimed at personal advantage as that of men. Her treatment of historical French sexual morality is as circumspect as could be consistent with the story she had to tell, and the fact that she made no claims or prescriptions for the future position of women made it difficult for her critics to find a locus for outright condemnation. It is difficult to judge why the *Quarterly* gave the work such an extended examination when, from its own point of view, the best course of action was to ignore it.

Two years later, Smith, Elder and Co. published the second of Kavanagh's non-fiction works. Its full title is *Women of Christianity exemplary for acts of Piety and Charity*. It was a single volume, but its 468 pages and some 145,000 words meant it was no negligible work. It is clear that, during this period, Kavanagh was extremely productive. Eleven volumes from her pen were published between 1848 and 1853. Of these, *Woman in France* and *Women of Christianity* would both have required extensive research. The prolific nature of many Victorian women writers is well documented by John Sutherland in the Introduction to his *Longmans Guide to Victorian Fiction*. However, writing of a quality sufficient to achieve the success of both *Madeleine* and *Nathalie*, as well as two substantial works of non-fiction, requiring considerable preparation, argue a very arduous work schedule. Adding to that, we know, from Brontë's account of their meeting,^[15] that, in 1850, Kavanagh was supporting her invalid mother and herself, and that "her father has quite deserted his wife and child." It can be of little surprise, therefore, that *The Academy's* obituary of Kavanagh records that "about 1853 she solaced her arduous labours by a lengthened visit to France, Switzerland and Italy." The question must be raised, therefore, whether Kavanagh's work suffered under this treadmill of activity. Certainly, the quality of her work in her third novel, *Daisy Burns*^[16] exhibits distinct signs of lack of care, though the novel does, as I argue elsewhere, deserve better than it gained from contemporary critics.

Women of Christianity, however, is a much more carefully written work, though its approach is, in many ways, slightly eccentric. The disparity in quality between her novel and this second non-fiction work may or may not have a single reason, but the nature of Kavanagh's commitment to her religion, and the return to the theme of women's influence suggests that this work was one to which she felt a personal commitment. Her fiction, at this stage, she may well have regarded as an exhausting commercial necessity. As already suggested, each of the four works discussed in this and Chapter 4 centre around a topic of close personal importance to Kavanagh.

There is no clear way of knowing whether the decision to write a work focusing on the contribution of women to Christian example was in any way constrained by the criticism which the *Quarterly* had levied against the earlier work. It must, however, be acknowledged that, in the

instance of religious faith, there was considerably greater acknowledgement of the existence of a substantial historical tradition of female contribution. Indeed, it is arguable that, in the conflation of religion with morality, there had - and perhaps still has - been an expectation of moral rectitude and example from women which is greater than that expected of men. That such an expectation has, in part, a basis in diverse factors such as the Marianism of the Catholic church since the Middle Ages, and the demands for sexual exclusivity which originate in Judaism and have their equivalents in many other faiths does, perhaps, explain this apparent masculine concession; it does not negate it. To some extent, therefore, for Kavanagh to discuss this area was less controversial than her treatment of eighteenth century France. Nevertheless, it allows her to voice some criticisms which show that her ideas on the nature of the influence of women had moved on since the first work. Though they are scattered throughout the text, they do present a greater reluctance to accept the limitations imposed on women than the earlier work, and, to that extent, could have been regarded as more controversial.

It has already been argued that Kavanagh probably had no clear overriding agenda in developing her works on women at this stage, though there may well have been some realisation of this by the time of the last two works. It is therefore more useful, since the works themselves give grounds for such an approach, to examine each in relation to their overt theme. The commonality which the theme of influence gives to them as a group rightly suggests a degree of similarity in treatment by Kavanagh; nevertheless, that theme is secondary to the major subject area in each case. Thus, Christianity is the essential centre of this second non-fiction work, just as the development of the French and English novel is the primary subject of the later ones. Equally, however, the secondary theme of feminine influence is integrated in each case; the balance remains with the novel, or eighteenth century France, or Christian women, but nevertheless, the experience of reading the four works gives a clear sense of the linking theory.

Women of Christianity sees Kavanagh in a more relaxed vein than when dealing with eighteenth century France. The most obvious reason for this is that, with such a subject, she is not required to deal with anything that offends her faith or nineteenth century moral outlook. There is,

however, a price to be paid for this. Given as a subject the behaviour of women who conform to the ethical ideal of the Christian religion, the devout Kavanagh could place only limited stress on women as the moving force; rather, that must be Christianity itself. As a counterbalance to this, however, she was working in an area where there had been traditionally less resistance to the influence (as opposed to power!) of women. Indeed, it would not be inaccurate to suggest that there was a conventional *expectation* of such influence. Kavanagh is careful, however, to stress the second part of her title. The emphasis is on positive action, as the text she chooses for the title page of the work makes clear:

Pure religion, and undefiled, before God and the Father, are this, to visit the
fatherless, and widows in their affliction, and to keep unspotted from the world.

-JAMES i 27.

Kavanagh is very specific about the limitations she sets for her choice of subjects; she uses the Preface to set this out as clearly as possible. She eschews those women like Jeanne d'Arc, whose role was outside that of acts of charity and piety, and likewise those who had led lives of exemplary meditation. There is an interesting aside at this point, however, worth recalling in the context of Kavanagh's views, since she praises the latter for having "asserted in their day - not, it is true, so completely as they have been asserted in ours - the intellect and genius of woman."^[17] Instead, she defines her subject as "other women more lowly, though not so great." They are those who are "fervent in their faith, pure in their lives, patient when it is their lot to endure, heroic when they had to act or suffer; and I felt that these were essentially the "Women of Christianity," and that to them belonged the first place by right."

The introduction is simply an outline of the earliest days of the church. It is, however, noteworthy that it takes its theme from the story of Tabitha or Dorcas in Acts, the "woman ... full of good works and alms-deeds that she did". It should be noted that this is the text which is taken for the funeral of Madeleine Guérin in Kavanagh's *Madeleine*; since the life of Kavanagh's model for Madeleine, Jeanne Jugan, is also recounted in the latter chapters of *Women of Christianity*, it is clear that this is a subject which is central to Kavanagh's attitudes to the position of women. She is

clear that she does not want the characteristics she attributes to women to be changed in any way, what she wants is for their special contribution to history and to society to be recognised and valued. This, she makes clear, is not something which will happen easily where history is, in the main, written by men. Such history, she remarks scathingly, is "the annals of nations not the story of humanity"^[18] Those women who reach the pages of history are celebrated because they fall into that masculine ethos. Kavanagh seeks instead to record the lives of "pure & good women". She is, of course, writing specifically of Christianity, and she argues that her first example, Dorcas, is an exemplar of the ethos introduced by that faith. The domestic virtues of Dorcas met no pagan ideal.

In the Introduction, Kavanagh goes on to argue that Christianity had given a new vision to women, who had formerly been "alternately the toy or drudge of man, whom only birth, beauty or genius could raise to equality"; Christianity, however, was about equality before God (p. 3). In Chapters 1 to 3, Kavanagh deals with the history of the Church until the fall of the Roman Empire. She is necessarily largely confined to rather scanty hagiography and legend, save where the writings of some of the early Fathers of the Church deal extensively with a particular woman, such as the mother of Saint Augustine. For the rest, there is a noticeable thinness to Kavanagh's writing, as she struggles to make the terse recital of deeds stand for the characters of the women who performed them. It is, however, a trap which would probably have proved unavoidable for any writer under the circumstances; Kavanagh is no Gibbon, nor - since she is accurate in her assessment of the way in which women were treated by history - had she more than limited sources to work from. It would have been incompatible with her project to use the techniques of fiction to fill out her sparse material. As a result, the recital of activities which survived on record simply because they exemplified virtue or charity produces a very one-dimensional tone.

Nevertheless, Kavanagh does what she can to make the most of her material, by a discreet analysis of the changes in the early Church, and the nature of the exceptional women each phase brought forth. Thus, Chapter 1 is almost wholly concerned with the activities of women martyrs, from Biblis to Julia of Carthage, and the four centuries of persecutions which began in AD177. Among stories of the women who met death for their faith, however, Kavanagh retains an eye for

scraps of human detail, like the woman who hid her son's clothing to prevent a public proclamation of his Christianity. Martyrs, however, did not readily fall into the definitions Kavanagh had set for her work, and she was clearly happier dealing with the second phase of women's contribution to the early Church.

The first of these were the earliest recluses. These attract an ambiguous response from Kavanagh similar to her treatment of religious asceticism. The extremes of religious fanaticism have a fascination for her, but the recluses she treats as a characteristic of Eastern Christianity: "Much that now seems exaggerated in all that is told of those penitents and recluses, we must ascribe to the eastern imagination and character. Christianity to them was more than a creed - it was a passion". (p. 21). Of more interest to her at this point is the larger group of influential women she describes as arising at this time, whom she characterises as "differing from the first converts and martyrs, . . . - women of home, and home virtues".^[19] There is a hint, in Kavanagh's tone, of exasperation at the way even women who achieve canonisation remain less recognised than men when she talks of: "The mothers, wives sisters and daughters of saints or Fathers of the Church: *saints themselves in life and name*" Kavanagh's examples of these women of home virtues included the married St. Macrina, who persuaded her mother to found two monasteries, one for women, one for men, and gave all she had to the poor. Kavanagh's own eventual belief in practical virtues has her include Anthusa, mother of St. John Chrysostom, who persuaded her son *not* to forsake the world. Her sympathies clearly are strongly influenced by the charity in the book's subtitle, when she gives considerable attention to Olympias, a widow of great wealth who refused to remarry, an action which enraged the Emperor. As a result, he ordered her property placed in trust until she was 30. She asked that instead it be divided between the Church and the poor; impressed by her attitude, he restored the property, which she then distributed, living herself in poverty, while relieving monasteries, hospitals, and the needy. Nevertheless, Kavanagh shows clearly how the Church remained dominated by men, with many of the women having influence because they were disciples of influential men, such as the female disciples of St. Jerome.

Kavanagh deals also with the founders of monasteries, such as Fabiola and Paula. As a Catholic, Kavanagh is naturally interested in that aspect of piety which consists in renouncing the world under vows of chastity and poverty, and quickly enters into a discussion of these themes. It is of a piece with her treatment of Nathalie and Rose Montolieu in *Nathalie* that we can see both respect and a certain attraction to such a life in Kavanagh's treatment of the subject, and a contrary hard-headedness about it. Coming from such an essentially pious writer, it brings one up short to read her coolly cynical appraisal of the popularity of a celibate life in the time of the early church:

Four ages of Christianity had nearly elapsed and women had still only the choice of evils: submission to the caprices of a tyrannical and licentious master, or ill usage. Need we then wonder at those crowds of virgins and women to whom their vows of chastity gave honour among men, and the freedom of hearts that owned no master save God? Alas! it was not always divine love that filled the cloisters of the olden time, and gave, for ages, so many brides to heaven. ^[20]

Chapter 3 of *Women of Christianity* is almost makeweight, with Kavanagh covering the deeds of women in the period after Constantine's conversion, particularly the so-called "pious princesses" of the 4th and 5th centuries. In actual fact, there is little that supports her major argument; the women were influential because they were princesses, not because they were either Christian or women. It is in Chapter 4 that Kavanagh turns to the influence of women on the development of the Christian faith during the Middle Ages. She argues (pp 54-67) that in the aftermath of collapse of the Roman Empire, several factors ameliorated total degradation in Europe: important among these factors were the interlinked influences of Christianity itself, an increase in the role of women in certain areas of the new societies becoming established, and the influence of monasteries (a term which, for Kavanagh, includes convents).

In this part of the book, Kavanagh makes a cogent case that women's influence now differed from that in the early years of the Church.

The women of whom we are going to speak had little in common with the early Greek and Roman converts to Christianity ... religion to them was more than the exercise of gentle and feminine

virtues; it helped them to subdue passions in all their native strength, and which the stern and degrading bondage of their masters had failed to tame (p. 55).

Attention has already been drawn to the sudden shafts of realism which intersperse Kavanagh's argument. Another comes at page 56; in explaining the attraction of Christianity to the women of the Dark Ages, she does not limit her reasoning to the virtues of Christianity to which she is so obviously devoted, but recognises more mundane reasons - "To those whom this world has not favoured, the glorious promises of the next will ever be most dear."

Some of the cases cited are in the now familiar pattern of the influence of a good Christian woman on powerful men, such as Genevieve of Nanterre. In addition, however, Kavanagh seeks to argue a wider case, making the claim that the slow conversion of nations had much to do with the enthusiasm of women. In parallel with the influence of Christian women in propagating their faith, Kavanagh also notes women beginning to take a more active part in the internal development of the medieval church, and the first women orders. Kavanagh also emphasises women's role in converting the pagan, often while espousing Christianity in pagan societies, giving as example St. Clotildis and others who accepted as a duty the propagation of the faith.

Kavanagh is successful in bringing out the confused tangle of cultures and ethical codes that formed the melting pot of Europe in the early Middle Ages. In Chapter 5, she continues her exploration of the growing numbers and influence of monasteries and convents. She is candid about her concentration on these:-

Nuns, princesses and queens are, for several ages, the only charitable and pious women of whose lives and actions there exists any record. Women of charity and household virtues no doubt existed then, as now; but they lived unheeded, and died unremembered: the veil and the crown eclipsed all else (p. 68).

This is essentially a restatement of the view she advances at the beginning of the book, save that here, Kavanagh evidently feels it superfluous to reiterate the view that history is essentially written by men. Nevertheless, the religious houses begin, for the first time, to make a small chink in the paternalistic record. Almost incidentally, Kavanagh refers to Lioba, the cousin of St. Boniface,

who was famed for her learning. It cannot be accidental that this is followed by a reference to Icasia, once the wife of the emperor Theophilus, who, rejected by him for her wit, carried on her literary pursuits as a nun. In spite of her piety, Kavanagh can find no ill to say of the many who sought the cloister as a place for learning. She pointedly follows a reference to an author "who wrote on the education of women, in the thirteenth century [and] limited her education to spinning and sewing, and expressly declared that, unless when she was intended to become a nun, no maid should be taught reading or writing." (p. 71) with a lengthy list of women noted for learning and literary success.

Chapter 6 has Kavanagh lapsing somewhat from the scholarly standards she has set herself in this work; possibly in relief at the fuller sources now open to her, she spends 18 pages on Elizabeth of Hungary. To be fair, this section fulfilled two roles essential to Kavanagh's declared purpose. In her Introduction, she had stated her concern as with the "lowliness of the Christian heart . . . of those women who honoured humanity" (p. 2). Here, for the first time, she has material for that in abundance. The second element, however, goes beyond this particular work and relates to the theme that this review of Kavanagh's work on the role of women seeks to explore. Critical to the story of Elizabeth is the fact that she was *influential*, through her humble and unself-regarding affection for the poor. Her story even supported Kavanagh's claim of different contributions by the two sexes; Elizabeth's husband too achieved canonisation, yet his piety was of a different, though complementary nature, a point the author is quick to remark upon. Elizabeth influenced by pious and meek example, in a way quite distinct from that of her masculine counterpart. Given this, and despite the imbalance which such a protracted example has on the flow of the book, there does seem to be some justification for Kavanagh's emphasis on one woman.^[21]

Chapter 8 has Kavanagh struggling with the problem of St. Catherine of Sienna, the daughter of a dyer, who simultaneously provides an exemplar of the powerful influence of ordinary women, and an exception to Kavanagh's definition of women's influence as operating in a domestic sphere, away from the currents of patriarchal history. Entering the Dominicans in 1365, despite parental opposition, Catherine had a gift of eloquence which, as Kavanagh dryly remarks, "does not

depend on the will and holiness of those who own it”.^[22] The formidable nun attained local fame as a negotiator between adversaries, and eventually between the Holy See and various rebellious city states.

Kavanagh is by no means unaware of the romantic attractions which attended a holy life, despite its poverty, and contrives to undermine this. Writing in Chapter 9 of the mystic St. Teresa of Avila, she notes the attempt of the seven-year old Teresa to lead her brothers to become first holy martyrs, and then hermits in their games. Pointedly, she then records how the Sanchez children next turned to the equally exciting tales of knight errantry and courtly love devoured by their ailing mother. The story of Teresa’s long and reluctant surrender to her vocation has, in itself, a dramatic quality which Kavanagh clearly relishes, but it is clear that it is Teresa *as a writer* who grips Kavanagh’s attention. “Her style, besides great freshness and felicity, has all the breadth and warmth of genius” (p. 140). It is clear that here, Kavanagh is diverted from her discussion of the influence of the woman by the influence of the writer.^[23] As her work on this period ends, Kavanagh deals with the slow rise of a rationalist and humanist spirit. She argues that, though the piety remained, the individualism of the earlier years was fading to uniformity.

When Kavanagh moves, in Chapter 11, to deal with the seventeenth century, she is approaching the period of *Woman in France in the Eighteenth Century*. The consistency of her views is reinforced when she takes the early opportunity to praise the contribution made by French women in this period. She refers to a projected work by Victor Cousin on important Frenchwomen of the seventeenth century of which “a few striking sketches” (p. 161) were produced, in terms which suggest these may have been an influence on the content and style of her own biographical works.

An interesting aspect of this chapter is its insight into Kavanagh’s own ecumenical leanings. Madame de Chantal in youth she describes sharply as showing “intemperate zeal which might have degenerated into bigoted intolerance” (p. 163). In middle age, de Chantal as a widow coped with the daily exigencies of life on behalf of her children; in age, she entered a convent. In the following chapter, Kavanagh deals with the foundation of the uncloistered sisters of charity, and their task of relieving the poor. From this seed developed work for the care of foundling children, and other

charitable associations of women, the forerunners of thousands of like charities in Kavanagh's own day. What Kavanagh particularly draws attention to is the power that women found within their grasp when they chose to combine their efforts outside the special case of the convent.

Kavanagh devotes Chapter XIII to Madame de Miranion, and her mixture of admiration and repugnance for extreme views on "amusements" is patent; Kavanagh is moved to remark "Strange and gloomy ideal of a Christian life and marriage" on a couple who "never spoke together of anything save death". Given Kavanagh's gift of a story to *Victoria Regia*, it is noteworthy that she emphasises de Miranion's establishment of workrooms and training for young women. In Chapter XVI, Kavanagh turns to the influence of women of Christianity in England. Though a Catholic herself, she tries, in the face of sparse records, to assert the part women played. Something of the gently humorous novelist in Kavanagh surfaces, despite her task of recording piety and charity, when she turns to the Duchess of Pembroke. She records with some glee the Duchess's reply to Charles II's secretary, when a parliamentary candidate was being pressed on her for a borough in her gift: "I have been bullied by a usurper, I have been neglected by a court, but I will not be dictated to by a subject; your man shan't stand. Anne Dorset, Pembroke and Montgomery." (p. 262).

Kavanagh's taste for such a response is scarcely the view of a rigid piety, and matches her remarks on de Miranion. This may well have significance for what we learn of Kavanagh's view of the role of women. It is clear, when *Women of Christianity* is taken in conjunction with *Woman in France*, that her emerging vision of what she sees as the contribution of the feminine influence is not simply a matter of oblique power, or piety; she sees women as bringing to bear their own domestic experience, their own understanding of the less glamorous practicalities of the world, a degree of pragmatism, and a civilising approach. It is, perhaps, too easy to associate her views solely with an acceptance of a gentler nature in women; here, however, she seems to be suggesting that the difference in women's approaches stems as much from a different experience of the world as from innate nature.

There is, of course, more ground covered in *Women of Christianity*, but the particular standpoint and principles which Kavanagh brings to the work are clearly enough established by the

areas of the work already covered. The application of these ideas, refined by further years of reflection, to Kavanagh's own craft of the novel will be examined in more detail in Chapter 4. The remainder of *Women of Christianity* carries the story forward to deal with women only recently dead, but, as the subjects become better known, Kavanagh's treatment becomes more orthodox, though markedly ecumenical in treatment, with Protestants given a treatment equal to that of Catholics. Though these later chapters add little to the approaches and concerns which Kavanagh has already established, they may usefully be summarised for the sake of completeness. Chapter XIV continues the story of the charitable works of seventeenth-century Frenchwomen, both in orders and laity. Of these, Kavanagh's treatment of Jeanne Biscot is a useful reminder of the author's preference for active charity over simple piety, when she calls Biscot's brief flirtation with the idea of taking a vow of seclusion an "act of folly" (p. 226). The following chapter deals with other charitable exemplars throughout Europe, with a strong focus on the Empress Eleanor of Austria. Chapter XVI, dealing with seventeenth century Englishwomen, is notable principally for Kavanagh's wry and, for once, personal opening comment:-

Frequently, whilst collecting materials for this work, have I had cause to regret that the lives of the good had been so briefly and imperfectly written, whilst of the profligate or notorious more than enough was known . . . Whilst we learn more than is needful of the mistresses and favourites of a licentious king, funeral sermons are almost the only authorities that give us an imperfect knowledge of purer characters. (p. 250).

Chapters XVII and XVIII continue the story of seventeenth-century Englishwomen, including well-known figures such as Anne Clifford, Duchess of Pembroke and Mrs Godolphin, and complete Kavanagh's consideration of the seventeenth century. Possibly because literary endeavour tended to confer some slight immortality on them, Kavanagh's selection from this point, as she turns to the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, seems touched by the spirit of letters; Mrs Godolphin was the friend of Evelyn, Mrs Elizabeth Rowe a published poet, and a colleague of Isaac Watts, while Kavanagh devotes several pages to Hannah More. Chapters XX to XXIII cover European women of Christianity, including Mary Leccinska, the queen of Louis XV, a queen of Prussia and an empress

of Russia. Chapter XXIV brings Kavanagh back to a familiar topic, the Montyon Prizes, including the story - again! - of Jeanne Jugan. The survey concludes with two chapters - the longest examination of a single subject in the book - on the Quaker Elizabeth Fry, and one on Sarah Martin.

Notes

- [1] From a note by Wolff, it appears that the work was, at one time, to have been called *Jeanne*. The change of name may have been intended to avoid embarrassment to Jugan. Despite her undoubted role as foundress of the order, Jugan had been removed as superior by the priest-moderator of the order in 1843. There was certainly a degree of antagonism by the Catholic hierarchy, who did not give Jugan her deserved recognition until after her death in 1879, withdrawing her to the motherhouse from 1852, and denying her any active role in a notably active order. The town in which she founded her hospital, Saint-Servan, did, however, successfully petition for the award of an annual Montyon Prize to Jugan in 1852. It is difficult to assess whether Kavanagh intended in part to plead Jugan's cause. Certainly, the fictionalising of the story did little to hide its original; Charlotte Brontë recognised the story as having appeared in *Chambers Magazine* (letter to W.S. Williams, 29 March 1848)

- [2] It is significant to note that the text which M. Bignon, the old curate who tries to give the heroine's funeral sermon in *Madeleine* is one which makes an early and significant appearance in *Women of Christianity*. On page 1, defining what Kavanagh means to deal with as women of Christianity, the first woman mentioned is Dorcas, the woman "full of good works, and alms-deeds that she did" (Acts, ix, 36).

- [3] At this point, it may be useful to suggest a possible explanation for the long hiatus between the first two non-fiction works and the last two. Though the question of women's influence remained important to Kavanagh, the question of extending it to women novelists must have appeared daunting to a writer who was, despite her early success, still at the beginning of her career. After *Nathalie*, her next two novels, *Daisy Burns* and *Grace Lee*, met with stringent criticism, and Kavanagh may then have felt unsure of her competence to continue her examination of the influence of women in relation to writers. Furthermore, even without the criticism, there is

evidence that Kavanagh tended to take some time to absorb events and influences from her milieu into her work; she had been nine years back in England before her first novel with an English setting, *Daisy Burns*, appeared in 1853, and it took her nearly ten years to make use of the Chartist protests she had observed, in *Rachel Gray* (1856).

- [4] "ART II.- 1. Histoire de Madame de Maintenon et des principaux Evénements du Règne du Louis XIV. Par le Duc de Noailles. Tom. i et ii, 8vo. Paris. 1848. 2. Woman in France during the Eighteenth Century . By Julia Kavanagh. In two volumes. 12mo. 1850." in *Quarterly Review* 88:352. Note that the reviewer couples Kavanagh's book with a two-year-old publication to support his criticisms of her views.
- [5] Kavanagh, Julia, *Woman in France during the Eighteenth Century* 2 vols, (London, Smith, Elder, 1850) Vol 1, p. 1
- [6] *ibid.*, Vol 1, p. 2
- [7] *ibid.* Vol 1, pp. 4-5
- [8] Kavanagh, Julia, *Seven years and Other Tales* 2 vols., (London, 1856)
- [9] Kavanagh, Julia, *Forget-Me-Nots* (London, Bentley, 1878)
- [10] Kavanagh, Julia, *Nathalie: a Tale* (London, Henry Colburn, 1850)
- [11] by Shirley Foster "A Suggestive Book": A Source for *Villette* in *Etudes Anglaises* T. XXXV, N° 2 (1982), p. 183.
- [12] *op. cit.* Vol 1, pp. 16-17
- [13] by Vineta Colby, *Yesterday's Women: Domestic Realism in the English Novel* (Princeton, 1974) p. 192.
- [14] Kavanagh, *op. cit.*, Vol 2, p. 215
- [15] Letter from Charlotte Brontë to Ellen Nussey, dated 12 June 1850, quoted in Symington and Ward p. 118. There is also evidence from a later letter (8 November 1850 to W.S. Williams) that Kavanagh had been ill.

- [16] Julia Kavanagh, *Daisy Burns, a tale* (London, Bentley, 1853)
- [17] Julia Kavanagh, *Women of Christianity, exemplary for Acts of Piety and Charity* (London, Smith, Elder and Co., 1852) p. iv.
- [18] *ibid.* p. 2.
- [19] *ibid.* p. 22
- [20] *ibid.* p. 36
- [21] Of passing interest is the way in which Kavanagh closes the description of Elizabeth of Hungary with a comment on a physical relic of her; the "Fountain of Elizabeth" at Wartburg; this bears more than a passing resemblance to the use Kavanagh makes of a similar fountain when introducing the pious Rose Montolieu in *Nathalie* (London, 1850).
- [22] *op. cit.* p. 123.
- [23] The response to St. Teresa's writings which can be gleaned from this part of *Women of Christianity* seems to owe as much to the self-revelation of her writings as to their theological content; Kavanagh writes at p. 141 that "the most interesting feature of these works is, that they portray Teresa as none else can portray her. She has written the story of her own life - of her struggles, backslidings, visions and fervent repentance - with a frankness and simplicity that render it little inferior to the Confessions of Saint Augustine." It is, perhaps worth recording how Kavanagh as a fiction writer was similarly influenced massively by Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre*, in its own way an honest, revelatory and highly charged work.

Chapter 4: Two Literary Environments - French and English women novelists.

Ten years passed, and Kavanagh's literary reputation had ebbed and flowed again before she returned to the subject of the influence of women, with the two companion volumes of *French Women of Letters: Biographical Sketches* and *English Women of Letters: Biographical Sketches*. Like their predecessors, they dealt with a topic of personal importance to Kavanagh, in this case the craft which had sustained her and her mother since her father's departure. They do, however, reveal an advance in her ideas; this is scarcely surprising; the Kavanagh of the earlier works was in her mid-twenties. Before, however, she had dealt with the greatness of France and the Christian religion as incontrovertible facts; the contribution of women was subordinate to those themes. This time, that theme was central, and the subject area one where she had made her own contribution, the development of the novel.

The pursuit of literature itself occupies Kavanagh's attention in the Introduction to *French Women of Letters: Biographical Sketches*; the particular role of women is unmentioned until page 5. Her comments on the function of the story teller provide an insight into Kavanagh's perception of her own function as writer, countering the view that literature was fundamentally escapism. She argues that fiction is an intellectual kingdom as vital to human aspirations as the physical, one which deals in "the hopes unfulfilled, the aspirations vague and undefined".^[1] She describes "a wish for the unknown" as "a torment haunting man's nature", and argues that readers admire novels precisely because they are "mere inventions". People need such inventions, she argues; some imaginary characters eclipse their authors, outlasting the environment which gave them birth. Tales such as Homer's *Iliad* last precisely because they reflect humanity, not as it is, but as it might be. Kavanagh writes contentiously but characteristically of the ideal characters of Romance. She claims that "the

men and women of books are never the men and women of real life" (p. 4) and that readers demand the noble and lofty. Put thus bluntly, her argument is clearly only one facet of the appeal of literature, but Kavanagh does make a case for that facet:-

contemporary romance . . . goes beyond mere facts and shews us what men aspired to be; and in the gulf between aspiration and fulfilment we read once more the great struggle between the spirit and the flesh, which every man carries on from his birth to his grave, which is the real story of humanity (p. 5).

Her argument is subtle, if vaguely realised; she describes the writer's art as presenting the "double figure" of the ideal and the real as a single figure. Kavanagh makes this an essential element of the book's thesis, claiming that the contribution of women authors particularly concerns the ideal. She carefully limits her claim to "modern prose fiction, and the share women have had in this is all we wish to examine"(p. 5).^[2] (This chapter will occasionally refer to the twentieth century reputations of writers with whom Kavanagh deals, in part to test the validity of her judgements.)

Kavanagh makes no claim that modern prose fiction in France arose from the work of women, though her first woman writer, Mlle Marie le Jars de Gournay, was active in the earliest developments of the form. Born about 1565, de Gournay's work was, as Kavanagh freely admits, more important for its existence than for intrinsic merit. While England advanced principally in poetry and the drama (despite the works of John Lyly, Thomas Lodge, Thomas Nashe^[3] and others), France and Spain developed a mastery of prose which prefigured the modern novel. Cervantes' *Don Quixote* is probably the most long-lived popular long prose fiction in the Western world while Rabelais provided one model for intellectually coherent fictions with *Gargantua and Pantagruel*. De Gournay, the adopted daughter and editor of the essayist Michel de Montaigne (1533-1592), drew on these developments. The eccentric title of her only novel, *Le Promenoir de Montaigne* (1589) referred simply to its origins as a tale told during a walk with Montaigne. The novel was exotic and melodramatic in content, and Kavanagh admits its oddities and pedantic style, but claims it as the first modern novel written in French by a woman.^[4] Kavanagh was perhaps overeager to identify a predecessor for the woman's novel; de Gournay's continuing reputation rests on her pamphlets, on

themes including a defence of the female sex, the French language and moral issues.^[5] Having identified her protomorphic woman novelist, Kavanagh cannot claim any distinctively female element in her work. The simple existence of a woman novelist was, however, a necessary prelude to the development of a distinctive tradition.

Madeleine de Scudéry (1607-67), however, produced novels of intrinsic value with some input from her brother Georges (1601-67).^[6] Kavanagh admits that de Scudéry's enormous novels and stilted language were, after two centuries, largely unread, but her contemporaries had ample leisure for such works. They were largely *romans à clef*, with de Scudéry's fashionable contemporaries parodied as Greeks, Romans or Persians. Kavanagh describes De Scudéry's audience as "exquisitely polished . . . elegant pleasures and refined conversation were its great occupation" (Vol. 1, p. 37). De Scudéry was providing the most precious of all gifts to such a small, elegant society - constant entertainment. A novel like *Le Grand Cyrus* came out in ten volumes, over a four year period (1649-1653), and could be absorbed piece by piece by a readership with much time hanging on its hands.

Apart from de Staël, Kavanagh asserts, no other French woman writer had "received more honours, more flattering distinctions, and more substantial rewards" (p. 38). Kavanagh regrets the decline of de Scudéry compared to de Staël; though changes in society and fashion played a part, de Scudéry was a poor and apolitical woman who wrote for her living. In Kavanagh's view, the changing habits of readers and a few lapses of taste, for which de Scudéry was pilloried by Boileau and Molière, effectively eclipsed "one of the most ingenious, delicate and refined minds that ever were reflected in fiction".^[7] These were attributes to which Kavanagh could not be indifferent; delicacy was a characteristic regularly identified in her own writings by contemporaries.

Kavanagh is, nevertheless, frank about other factors in de Scudéry's decline. The tales, she remarks baldly, (p. 39) "were too long" (a judgement given added plangency by Kavanagh's own early struggles with the demands of the three-volume novel. Indeed, even in de Scudéry's own time, the conversations, the novels' best feature, were extracted and published separately.^[8] Time also destroyed a contemporary asset; de Scudéry spun her long tales around not only the people, but the

houses, even furnishings about her, rendering modern battles and generals under archaic and exotic names. For succeeding generations, that was lost.

Kavanagh records the odd relationship between de Scudéry and her brother, who was apt to lock his sister up to get on with her profitable writing (p. 47). While the two remained together (until his advantageous marriage) he publicly claimed sole authorship of *Ibrahim* (1641) and *Le Grand Cyrus*.^[9] For Kavanagh, supporting herself and her mother by her pen after her father's desertion, and with the memory of the *Hobbies* controversy (see Chapter 8), this must have seemed a distorted mirror of her own position. It becomes significant that attributes Kavanagh commends in de Scudéry often characterise her own work. She remarks that de Scudéry was, where her honour was not at issue, "too prudent to quarrel with the world and its opinions" (Vol.1 p. 54). Kavanagh herself avoided public notice, breaking her reticence only to confront her father's publisher over *The Hobbies*. One comment on de Scudéry particularly has implications about Kavanagh's attitudes to her own work. She argues that de Scudéry's responsiveness to public taste:-

gives us a key to her literary weakness and success. She wrote badly - because the taste of the majority was bad - and she succeeded because she pleased that taste.

Kavanagh must have recognised the quandary; she too was serious about her writing, but susceptible to the whims of the public. Committed to the model *Jane Eyre* provided, she had abandoned some of her individuality to the demands of its the formula, though the security that gave her allowed the occasional freedom to be Julia Kavanagh of the books on "the woman question", or to indulge the personal vision that produced *Madeleine* and *Rachel Grey*.

The pattern for Kavanagh's treatment of her subjects is established with de Scudéry; a biographical outline, a discussion of the individual qualities of each writer (de Scudéry is shown as witty, but moral, a model Kavanagh herself aimed at), and a précis of the major works. Her final verdict was that de Scudéry's works had represented an extreme taste; their neglect had good cause, but that they elevated modesty and moral feeling (Vol 1 p. 70). Given Kavanagh's current neglect, it is interesting to note her crisp analysis of why de Scudéry was no longer read:

The very charm which (novels) possess for contemporaries, of expressing the feelings and painting the manners of the day, takes from their interest with another generation. Their truth is minute, contemporary truth--it is seldom the broad, tragic or comic truth of all time. Their men and women do not act and talk as men and women always would, but after the fashion of a day, sometimes of a circle. Thus the tone is caught, and with it a sort of reality, which posterity cannot feel, or, feeling it, cannot be entertained with. (Vol 1 p. 73)

Kavanagh's analysis of de Scudéry's work is subtly parodic, highlighting the rigid artificiality of de Scudéry's world through adjectives of comic absoluteness; heroes are "illustrious", heroines, "admirable"; fidelity is "immaculate" and returned with "rigid decorum". In this single paragraph (Vol 1, pp. 73-74), Kavanagh punctures the artifice of de Scudéry's plot, through incidents "without number" to "happiness in the last page of the tenth volume".^[10] Kavanagh, however, reminds her readers that many mid-nineteenth-century plots were as improbable as de Scudéry's and mischievously claims that her characters were "too noble and lofty" (p. 75) for a Victorian readership in *Ibrahim, or the Illustrious Bassa* (1641), *The Great Cyrus* and *Clelia*.

Unusually, and revealingly, Kavanagh adds a short chapter (Chapter VI) discussing de Scudéry's purpose, "eminent and apparent above the rest; the wish to improve the moral, social and intellectual condition of women". De Scudéry conceived "love" in Kavanagh's view, as the source of women's power, but it had both an ideal and a real aspect. Love was not virtuous in itself; as an involuntary feeling, the virtue, for de Scudéry, rested in the ability of those who felt it to accord to its object the devotion, virtue and sacrifice which an involuntary feeling could inspire. Here, Kavanagh parts company with de Scudéry whose :

delineation of love has delicacy, finesse and a general perception of truth; but . . . no fervour, no passion, no sorrow, none of the grand marks of love in every time. It is a moral agent, meant to refine man and raise women (Vol.1, p. 159).

Kavanagh applauds de Scudéry's view that ignorance born of poor education was inimical to women's improvement. One character suggests that "whosoever would attempt to put down what

fifteen or twenty women say when they are together would write the worst book in the world.”

Kavanagh remarks dryly that “no man ever uttered a severer sentence than this on the small talk of women”.^[11] De Scudéry had blamed contemporaries for not wanting to read; in her own time, Kavanagh suggests a more subtle problem, that for women, “the evil is that books are made too light and easy, precisely because they are now the majority of readers.” (Vol. 1, p. 161). Kavanagh highlights a discussion on novels where one character claims that the novelist must know “the world and its manners, . . . the secret of all hearts, and deprive morality of its harshness” and another retorts that, if such a one could be found, the world would still regard it as “a trifle and a useless amusement”(pp. 159-160).

With a few passing remarks on the moral superiority of de Scudéry over her English counterparts of the English Restoration Kavanagh turns to Madame de La Fayette. Kavanagh quotes the letters of Mme de Sévigné and the judgement of Boileau on de La Fayette that she was the woman in France who “wrote best, and had most *esprit*”. Born in 1633, and well educated, de la Fayette married the Marquis in 1655 and moved in high circles. Henrietta Maria, widow of the executed Charles I of England, died in her arms. Unlike de Scudéry, de la Fayette, was a notably concise writer. Kavanagh quotes a letter of Madame de Maintenon as claiming “Mme de la Fayette would have approved the sincerity of my language and the brevity of my narrative”(Vol.1, p. 187). De la Fayette was serious and quiet, temperamentally the opposite of her gregarious contemporary, but with a candour unsuited to society. She was close on the one hand to the gay Madame de Sévigné, and on the other to the dour, disappointed La Rochefoucauld, author of the famous maxims.^[12] Kavanagh conjectures that de la Fayette’s marriage was a cold and cheerless one:

He probably was little or nothing to his wife; her children left her early as was then the custom; she was rich and had nothing to do; she was delicate, and not fond of pleasure; at thirty two, after being married ten years, she thought herself old.” (Vol 1, p. 192).

That conjecture comes from de la Fayette’s three works, which, Kavanagh avers, all “tell but one story, which in its main features is [de la Fayette’s] own; the struggle between duty and passion in the heart of a virtuous woman, united to a man she cannot love” (Vol. 1, p. 193). At this

point, a hasty authorial voice intervenes to assure her readers that “we do not think that Madame de la Fayette went so far as passion”, a denial which she smoothly turns to a discussion of the friendship of women as a particular feature of French social and literary history. The relationship of this discussion of female friendships to Kavanagh’s main theme of women’s civilising influence is clear; she writes of such affection as having been calm, polite and amiable in polished times, heroic and devoted in evil days.

Kavanagh seizes on de la Fayette’s long friendship with the embittered La Rochefoucauld as an example of that civilising influence. In his declining years, the author of the maxims came to rely on de la Fayette. For his part, according to Kavanagh, La Rochefoucauld contributed to the revision of *La Princesse de Clèves* (1678).^[13] Kavanagh suggests that in that work, de la Fayette “painted that love she had never felt, and which her friend - had the difference in their years allowed them to meet in youth - might so easily have inspired” (Vol.1, p.197). Kavanagh’s pragmatism concedes however that it would have been unlikely to have been reciprocated.

Kavanagh devotes a chapter each to *Zayde* and *La Princesse de Clèves*. *Zayde*, with its defective plotting and archaic conventions, had no interest for a later audience.^[14] Nevertheless, for Kavanagh it represents a step towards the modern novel, with characters more flawed than de Scudéry’s, and thus more interesting. Kavanagh finds much that is preposterous in the story, particularly the intense interest the hero’s friends take in whether *Zayde* loves him. This produces a barbed comment by Kavanagh on romantic love, the theme of most of her novels; it throws light on her attitude to many of her creations:-

There is this marvellous feature in love: that, whilst it is infinitely important to the person concerned, to lookers-on it seems little better than a fevered dream. They who love move in a world that is both enchanted and splendid, and they weary not to talk of its delights; they who look on see nothing but a barren waste - hear nothing save idle words, that sound to them as the merest ravings of deluded hearts. (Vol.1, p. 208).

La Princesse de Clèves, for Kavanagh, is a substantial step towards the modern novel. (Its innovative change of tone was recognised by de la Fayette's contemporaries; Père Bougeant, a Jesuit literary critic active at the start of the 18th century, remarked of the work that it "dépeint sans complaisance le monde cruel . . . et renverse les règles de Jeu").^[15] Nominally set in an earlier time, de la Fayette invested it essentially with contemporary people and mores. Kavanagh's plot summary is entangled with discussions of the innovative aspects of the work. She compares Madame de Clèves' would-be lover, Nemours, with his "ideal of attractive and amiable qualities, distinct from virtues", to Richardson's Sir Charles Grandison. The former, though like "the prince in the fairy tale", is slyly described by Kavanagh as "unfortunately more credible than Sir Charles Grandison, of moral memory". Kavanagh, while making no mention of Richardson's Lovelace in *Clarissa*, draws an implicit analogy by describing Nemours as a man who "has never known a woman to resist him, nor met one whom he really loved". (Vol. 1, p. 228). She defines Nemours (p. 229) in ways which differentiate him from Lovelace - "no deliberate plan of seduction, no outbreak of passion, renders him odious, or mars with violence his respectful tenderness".

Kavanagh emphasises that de la Fayette tells her tale solely from the Princess's point of view, and its consequence that "the Duke de Nemours is only so far interesting as to justify the love of the Princess of Clèves". (p. 230) This focus, for Kavanagh, marks a transition from the novel of romance - which *Zayde* was - to the novel of character. The succession of incidents remains, but, as Kavanagh makes clear, serves a narrative purpose in developing the self-realisation and resolve of the heroine. A crucial conversation is identified by Kavanagh, where the princess begs her husband to allow her to remain away from court, letting him know she wishes to protect herself and him from the possibility of her developing an attraction to another. While de Genlis later described this civilised and sensitive conversation as cold, for Kavanagh it reveals a deep underlying passion by the simple fact of confession, which the fastidious civility of the conversation merely counterpoints.^[16]

Kavanagh judges *La Princesse de Clèves* as a major contribution to the novel, "one of the first and saddest love-stories of the modern school of novel . . . a landmark in the history of fiction". "The whole story lies in the struggle between love and duty in the heart of Madame de Clèves.

Simply and without effort, Madame de la Fayette reached the centre of all interest - the heart and conscience of a human being. The greatest, the finest domestic novels that have been written since then possess no other.” (Vol. 1, p. 253).^[17]

Madame de Tencin was much less to Kavanagh’s taste. Already treated at length for her social and political influence in *Woman in France in the Eighteenth Century*, (Vol.1, pp86-96), de Tencin was to Kavanagh a “profligate dissembler”. She is, for Kavanagh, an object of simultaneous distaste and fascination. Kavanagh admits that de Tencin’s posthumously published works were the first rival worthy of de la Fayette. As a sidelight on the power Kavanagh accords literature; she suggests that Tencin turned to literature *because* she was debarred, as a woman, from politics.^[18] De Tencin’s stories were at odds with the corrupt tenor of the author’s life, were not intended seriously for publication, and had deliberately misleading dedications. They were found in her papers when she died, her beauty and influence gone, aged 68, in 1749. Kavanagh’s views de Tencin’s particular contribution to the novel as “eloquence of passion”, for Kavanagh one of the special gifts which women brought to the novel. She admits that Aphra Behn could claim to have introduced some such passion, though in what she calls delicately a “coarse and sullied” way, and - with more justice - in relation to “wrath and generous indignation” (Vol.1 p. 278) but Behn, as Kavanagh points out, had no obvious successor in this vein; “the great English novelists of the last age did not deal in the eloquence of passion”. Here, once more, Kavanagh is diverted from her main theme to make the claim that “the domestic novel is English, the impassioned novel is French”.^[19]

Kavanagh theorises that de Tencin attempted to supply in her own work “a troubled charm, more than mere tenderness, a purer fever than that of the senses” she found lacking in her contemporaries. This leads Kavanagh to a general observation that the rise of passion in literature characterises times when faith is weak. She argues that this arises because the exaltation of feelings between two people distracts from feelings towards God. Indeed, she claims, licence flourishes in *religious* epochs, when there is inclination to claim it as the product of the heart. At times, Kavanagh’s language becomes surprisingly intemperate: “Passion is the morbid work of the imagination” (Vol.1 p. 280) and she wanders briefly in her condemnation from the literary treatment

of passion to passion itself. It is unusual for Kavanagh to lose narrative control in this way. Her own work, despite its debt to *Jane Eyre*, shows few signs of the passionate absorption she here condemns, an abstention probably deliberate. She recognises the reality of passion, and claims - a little unconvincingly - that her objection is to an unrealistic elevation of passion, and the avoidance of showing the consequences of its demise: she writes that [passion's] "victims or its objects all pass away from us in the full bloom of loveliness, strength and youth. There is nothing to remind us of Rousseau's real Julie in her decrepit, foolish age; of Goethe's eightieth year, of Madame de Staël's pining for life on her death-bed" (Vol. 1 p. 281).

Kavanagh concedes that de Tencin was an idealist on two points; "the worst and the weakest have some ideal to which they cling" (Vol. 1, p. 282). The first, Kavanagh describes as "the immortality of ardent love", the second was religious enthusiasm. Nevertheless, both are, for Kavanagh, defective. On passion, she acidly remarks that few more than de Tencin "can have known the real brevity of a feeling she had inspired and experienced too often". As for de Tencin's religious feelings, she suggests she "felt the poetry of religion, but not its austerity - the charm of cloisters and convent homes, but not their innocence". She concludes that de Tencin's fictions may have reflected a personal dichotomy between passion and faith. Given the private character of de Tencin's works, that argument has some force; however Kavanagh's moral sensibilities find in such productions as *The Memoirs of Comminge* a dangerous blurring of sacred and profane love that she cannot accept, though she agrees with the literary judgement of La Harpe, who regarded the work as the first able to match that of de la Fayette. (Vol. 1, pp. 293-4).^[20] In admitting this, Kavanagh's words suggest an assessment of her own place in literature as much as that of her nominal subject:-

This is the fame which posterity awards to fiction. Every hundred years every language produces two or three novels that live for another century - sometimes for a little more. The rest, the countless multitude that had their day, are but their short-lived offspring, doomed to perish in their infancy. (Vol. 1, p. 293)

Kavanagh's novelists to this point held some position in society. Her next was an author whose claim to fame could derive only from her writings. Madame Riccoboni (1714-1792) has,

however, made negligible impact on posterity; and Kavanagh again shows signs of empathetic partiality.^[21] However, she claims for Riccoboni one of the key attributes which she claims women contributed to the novel - "a subtle grace in feeling and style . . . which springs partly from their nature and partly from their education" (Vol. 1 p. 301). Riccoboni herself is quoted as saying "Men are educated; women educate themselves; their heart is their teacher, a clever teacher, whose method is sure." According to Kavanagh, the first version of *Letters of Mistriss Fanni Butlerd to Milord Charles Alfred de Caitombridge Earl of Plisinte, Duke of Rafligh*, written in 1735, translated from the English in 1756 by Adélaïde Varançai are those of Riccoboni herself with just sufficient amendments to turn them into a fiction. Later works were less autobiographical but Kavanagh sees Riccoboni's shattered love affair as permeating her later works: "the secret war which is ever going on between the two sexes . . . , finds in her an able and eloquent, though often severe, partisan." She quotes one bitter jibe: "One of the advantages of the superiority of man's soul over ours, is that strength of mind which he uses to stifle the remorse wakened in his heart by the memory of a feeling and unhappy woman." (Vol. 1, p. 312). Riccoboni's second novel, *The Marquis of Cressy*, Kavanagh finds uninteresting, except for its introduction of one of the first bad heroes of the novel, the eponymous Marquis, fascinating and brave, but also passionate and deceitful. Kavanagh distinguishes him from what she calls the "heroic villain of the modern school"; with his shameful meanness, "we sometimes pity [him] - we never admire him". (Vol. 2 p. 3).

Kavanagh's next author was regarded by contemporaries as a rival to de Staël. Though Madame de Genlis's reputation had declined by Kavanagh's time, her life was as interesting as her work. Kavanagh speculates whether her decline was entirely literary. Highly regarded in her own time as a writer of moral works for the young, she was revealed posthumously as the "profligate mistress of a corrupt Prince". Kavanagh's French phlegmatism at such matters surfaces unexpectedly in a tongue-in-cheek suggestion that de Genlis's reputation had suffered, not because of her immodest life, as would be expected, but because:

her good character has injured her literary reputation. No one would say that a

badly-conducted woman could not write admirable works of fiction; but few would dispute

that sweeping judgement of superficial readers, that it is impossible for a governess, and the writer of moral works destined for the young, to write anything but a dull novel (Vol. 2 p. 32).

For Kavanagh, de Genlis had many qualities that deserved a better fate. The other French authors she deals with - de Charrière, de Krüdener, Cottin and de Staël) are increasingly part of an international movement, with declining distinction between the two traditions, and offer comparatively little insight into Kavanagh's own attitudes and practices. For that, we need to turn to the English tradition which she herself practised.

English Women of Letters: Biographical Sketches appeared in 1863. Kavanagh makes clear in her opening note "To the Reader", that the French and English works were complementary, and had been written simultaneously. Both were restricted to writers of an earlier generation, or, in Kavanagh's words, those recently dead who had "already stood the test of all merit - time". In this pantheon, the first volume of *English Women of Letters* offers Aphra Behn, Sarah Fielding, Fanny Burney, Charlotte Smith and Ann Radcliffe. The second volume adds Mrs Inchbald, Maria Edgeworth, Jane Austen, Elizabeth Opie and Lady Morgan.

The selection is unsurprising to modern readers, and indeed, was not wholly original to Kavanagh. As early as 1843, Anne Elwood had advanced a similar pantheon in her *Memoirs of the Literary Ladies of England*. Kavanagh, however, improves on Elwood's approach through her link with the French tradition. Elwood was conspicuously more interested in the lives of her subjects than in their works, and lacked the sense of historical development and serious purpose that characterises *English Women of Letters*. Again, Kavanagh alternates biographical chapters with analyses of key works except with Sarah Fielding, whose scant output enables the two to be combined. This approach limits opportunity for comparisons of themes or genres, but allows a sense of purpose and historical continuity and development in the work.

Kavanagh first considers Aphra Behn, despite a nineteenth-century consensus that excluded her as a significant figure: "the grave, the name, the poems, the novels and histories, the plays and dramas, of Aphra Behn have shared one fate, oblivion".^[22] Kavanagh's contemporaries, she remarks,

had “ceased to read coarse books and will no longer tolerate them”.^[23] That a pious mid-Victorian spinster of “safe” reputation was prepared to commend - albeit with strong reservations - an authoress whose licentious works were of note even in Restoration England says much for Kavanagh’s honesty. Against the ethos of which she herself was a prime example, she sought to be one of the “plain dealers” her subject applauded in considering the literary merits of Behn’s work. Though she does not accord Behn the stature she now commands, Kavanagh is rigorously fair.

It was certainly not easy for Kavanagh, given the “impropriety” of Behn’s work - “the inveterate coarseness of her mind sullied Aphra Behn’s noblest gifts”.^[24] Her honesty, however, forces her to admit that it is “those tales of Mrs. Behn’s which escape that reproach [of coarseness that] are flat and uninteresting.” The second chapter deals with *Oroonoko*, summarising the story for a generation who were hardly likely to have read it. Kavanagh concludes that Behn exceeded in her achievement both de Scudéry and de La Fayette. “It is very true” she remarks conscientiously, “that in the hands of either lady all the gross and offensive passages would have vanished”, but Behn had “two gifts in which she far excelled either of the French ladies - freshness and truth.”

Kavanagh structures her discussion of her English novelists to complement her sketches of French authors. Chapter 1 recapitulates the theme of both books - the comparison of the “two great literatures that have ruled Europe for . . . two hundred years: the French and the English”,^[25] and their distinguishing characteristics. Her success in drawing that distinction is, at best, partial, however. Her comparisons are subjective and unscholarly, but her familiarity with both literary traditions allows some useful conclusions. Her lack of academic apparatus - unsuitable for her intended general audience - does not invalidate her work. Given the state of women’s education in her time, and the limiting circumstances of her early years, it is more surprising to note what Kavanagh was able to achieve. She pays attention to the differing French and English markets, claiming (somewhat obscurely) that English novels were less likely than French to be discarded as a mere matter of fashion.

Kavanagh does not link the *Women of Letters* books with her *Woman in France in the Eighteenth Century* and *Women of Christianity*, though each attempts to establish a significant

history for women in its specific area. Nonetheless, in the case of her English writers, Kavanagh claims that the writing of women had, for the seventy years before 1863, bid fair to "become an overwhelming influence" on the novel. Indeed, she suggests implicitly that Aphra Behn was a prime founder of the English novel form, maintaining that the works of Swift and De Foe are "wonderful books - but assuredly not novels"(I, p. 49).^[26]

It was not Kavanagh's premise that "the feminine attributes of delicacy, tenderness and purity" she saw as brought to the novel by women writers were entirely beneficial. She writes that the novel has "gained and suffered from feminine influence",^[27] but, though she applauds the "faculty of implying that which cannot be told", she fully recognises the reverse of the coin - "this refinement is ... excellent until it prevents truth." She is pointed about imaginary excellences, but warns that "neither in good nor evil let [fiction] belie truth if it wishes to live." There seems to be a stubbornness in Kavanagh's nature which, however much she supported the proprieties - and her condemnation of Behn's coarseness was, as we have seen, sharp - did not allow her to shrink from making judgements founded on literary merit.

Sarah Fielding was more congenial to Kavanagh than Behn. She declines, however, to exaggerate the contribution of Fielding or her contemporaries to the development of the novel. "Women" she writes, "were passive during [a major part of the eighteenth century]; we cannot, with truth, ascribe to them an important part."^[28] Fielding's *David Simple* was, by Kavanagh's day, almost forgotten. Kavanagh seeks to assess its literary merits, independent of Fielding's significance as a woman close to both the most famous novelists of the day, Richardson and her own brother Henry. With a sidelong assault on Richardson's vanity - she considered Fielding to be "England's greatest novelist" - Kavanagh describes the "yet unformed school" in which *David Simple* was produced; her brother was not to publish *Tom Jones* for five years, and, in Kavanagh's view, Fielding was never able to determine whether she was writing a story or a sketch of characters, while narrative and dialogue struggle oddly. Kavanagh comments acutely on "the somewhat perplexed character"^[29] of the book, and the marked discrepancies in style between its two volumes. She is alert, however, to qualities in *David Simple* which foreshadow Fielding's brother's masterpiece;

Sarah Fielding uses the picaresque form, familiar from *Gil Blas*, in a new way; her hero is no picaro, but a serious young man, whose search is for a true friend. As Kavanagh notes, she may have wished to "write a moral book, but the Picaresca school does not deal with morality, it deals with truth".^[30] Kavanagh is reinforcing her view of the nature of the modern novel, an aspect which is at the heart of her reservations about the influence of women in the development of the novel.

Kavanagh notes that the decline of the sentimental told against the popular survival of *David Simple*: "What made our forefathers laugh keeps the same power over us, but not in an equal degree that which made them weep".^[31] She argues that, though human sorrows are unchanging, their delineation is an area where the taste of the age is a major factor in the acceptability of the work, and that, for this reason, the earlier part of *David Simple*, stressing characters, (and incidentally, more akin to the work of Henry Fielding) was, in the mid-nineteenth century, more palatable than the Richardsonian melancholia of the later part.

Enough has been said to give an impression of both Kavanagh's approach and arguments. For the remaining authors, it will perhaps suffice to note how Kavanagh uses discussion of them and their works to expand on her theses. In the true nature of such a Francophile, Kavanagh prefers the title Madame D'Arblay to Fanny Burney for her next subject, though she notes the Irish origin of the Burney family. She also remarks on the author's "strong dislike to learning in women"^[32] (v. 1, p. 94) and its root in a dislike of being different; commenting on that conformism, she concludes that "There is, for a woman especially, great prudence and some propriety in thus abiding by the world's opinion, but is there generosity?" (I, p.100). While identifying Burney with the English tradition, she also places her within an international literary coterie, with contacts with de Genlis and de Staël.

Burney's novels *Evelina* and *Cecilia* were still read in Kavanagh's day. She ascribes this to their reality, and to the fact that they were delicate and pure enough for Victorian tastes. For Kavanagh, however, that delicacy was not intellectual, and was one achieved at the expense of a degree of coldness - "not bitter but . . . certainly not genial"(I, p.122). Kavanagh regrets the decline from the humanity of the "coarse, offensive" authors of a previous generation to Burney's heroes and heroines who are "pleasing and lively, but they are subordinates; and her great characters - the

ridiculous, the vulgar and the selfish, though very entertaining, do not "belong to the depths of human nature". Though Kavanagh treats Burney's contribution seriously, the author lacks for her one of the major characteristics she sees women as bringing to the novel, tenderness. In its place Burney brings a merciless dissection of social vulgarity. Nevertheless, Kavanagh ranks Burney's contribution highly, comparing her intensely correct heroines with those of de Staël.

Mrs. Charlotte Smith was a writer whose reputation had all but vanished in Kavanagh's own day. Smith's troubled life provides fruitful material for Kavanagh's biographical sketch, and, indeed, despite her determinedly critical tone, there are suggestions of sympathy for that endlessly harassed writer. Possibly Kavanagh, with her own financial and family troubles, felt a certain empathy for the Francophile Smith. She is blunt about the faults as well as the merits of Smith's work, remarking on a "great talent" spoiled by "haste and facility" (I, p.187), and overshadowed by Burney before her, and contemporaneously by Mrs Radcliffe. Kavanagh records wryly that it is not moderation, but excess that strikes the public. In discussing *Emmeline*, *Ethelinde* and *The Old Manor House*, Kavanagh remarks aphoristically that "It is Mrs Smith's fault that she had none, and yet is not perfect" (I, p.195). While insisting on "a sort of mediocrity" in Smith's work, Kavanagh sees her as the connecting link between two schools, becoming - claims Kavanagh, writing at a time when the genre was dominant - "the most characteristic representative of the modern domestic novel", and was "quite distinct in this respect from the writers of her times".

In the context of *Emmeline*, Kavanagh expands her ideas about the ambivalence of women's contribution to the novel. She claims that "For a long time men wrote alone, and their minds were the minds of humanity. We had not the perfect and twofold human being until women wrote" (I, p.197). Women's writing, for Kavanagh, brought delicacy, refinement and religious feeling, and rid literature of "the depiction of woman as mere woman - as the embodiment of beauty and the object of passion" (I, p.198). Conversely, however, they brought the problem of an insistence on the centrality of love, and promotion of an exaggerated and hypocritical refinement. Their earliest members showed women as virtuous and beautiful, but predominantly the latter. Smith's contribution was to set against such silly young creatures women of "intellect and refined manners".

This, in Kavanagh's view, both reflected and influenced the values of Smith's time by holding up new role models. They were not perfect - "too sensitive, too easily frightened (and they) weep too much and too often" - but that, Kavanagh reflects, continued in her own day. *The Old Manor House* she particularly commended for its truth, particularly in its sharply observed portrait of old Grace Rayland, and for Smith's powers of description. Despite the resemblances between Smith's circumstances and her own, there was a sharp difference in their responses, which Kavanagh clearly dislikes. She comments sharply on the elements of rebellious complaint that surface in Smith's work.

Volume I ends with Mrs Radcliffe. Kavanagh starts with a rapid resumé of the genesis of the Gothic novel, its emphasis on the Middle Ages, and the enervating effect of this on the novels. Anne Radcliffe, for Kavanagh, revitalised the genre, making her tales just sufficiently remote to add a romantic frisson. Kavanagh obviously empathises with Radcliffe's careful cultivation of personal obscurity, and her retirement at the peak of her powers. She finds difficulty, however, while insisting on Radcliffe's sweetness and moral strength, in fitting her into the pattern of literary development of women, since she never moved in literary circles.^[33] For Kavanagh, Radcliffe seems to be almost wholly divorced from the contemporary mainstream, and such inheritance as she had lay through Scott. Her final judgement (I, p. 252) is of Radcliffe as a kind of sport, who "did what none had attempted before".

Radcliffe does, however, allow Kavanagh a further opportunity to discuss the failings of women's education; her productions, for Kavanagh, "betray a mind which had long lain dormant, and that wakened too late to the consciousness of great gifts" (I, p. 254). History has given Radcliffe a better place than Kavanagh expected, but when she turns to the detail of Radcliffe's work, much of what she says is not out of tune with a twentieth-century assessment. Radcliffe, argues Kavanagh, depicted evil through atmosphere and images, rather than character - suggesting, rather than creating terror.

One passage discussing the author's treatment of solitude in *The Romance of the Forest* illumines Kavanagh's own love of privacy: "It is sweet not to see faces we do not love, not to hear speech that offends or wearies, not to feel the cold or searching glance of the stranger's eye."

Nevertheless, such reticence had its price; Kavanagh discovers in the laboured explanations of apparently supernatural phenomena, and the conventional nature of Radcliffe's characters in *The Mysteries of Udolpho* a timidity and unwillingness in the author to press her imagination to its conclusions. Only in rare cases, such as Schedoni in *The Italian*, did Radcliffe create anything genuine. Given the origins of many of Kavanagh's heroes in Edward Rochester, it is unsurprising that she recognises the power of this character, a clear influence, as Kavanagh points out, on the Byronic hero (p. 324). Apart from Scott, Kavanagh suggests that Radcliffe's influence on the novel was negative, with the Gothic genre lapsing into decadence. Critics like Hazlitt, and the Romantic poets, including Wordsworth and Byron, were the inheritors of the rich suggestions in Radcliffe's writing.

Mrs Elizabeth Inchbald and *A Simple Story* take up the first chapter of Volume II of *English Women of Letters*. The facts of Inchbald's life give a great deal for Kavanagh to work with - the book is, after all, "Biographical Sketches" - and one may suspect some sympathy in Kavanagh for a fellow Catholic, however little the early part of her life reflected Kavanagh's own love of the orderly and discreet. At 26, however, Inchbald, alone, poor, and aiding a host of ungrateful relatives, was a natural subject for Kavanagh's sympathies. Curiously, Kavanagh claims Inchbald's lack of education as a positive contribution to the success of the novel, as she records in a style which mimics Inchbald's own:-

Mrs Inchbald was ignorant and straightforward. She had a story to tell; to do so gave her plenty of trouble, as she informs us; to tell it in the simplest and plainest way was her object. The result is wonderful. She never stops nor her story neither. There are plenty of excellent books out of which we might strike pages; we could not omit a line in "A Simple Story".

When she turns to the plot of *A Simple Story*, the first half of the story, that of Miss Milner, is detailed with little comment, save for one on the effect of her love for her priest-guardian, Mr Dorriforth. The second half of the book, which Inchbald joined from a second novel, finds Kavanagh in a quandary. "There" she says severely of the first part, "the story should have ended. Not unwise is the law of old romances that closes a love tale with marriage." Kavanagh argues the case in a way

which shows clearly that she, at that time, accepted fully the premise that love was the proper subject matter for the woman novelist. The argument runs that the sorrows of love are the material of the story, culminating in marriage; thereafter, either “change and weariness” will ensue, or, if not, a continued felicity, neither of which are, in her consideration, suitable material for the novel. (It is worth noting in passing that Kavanagh’s own *Nathalie* and *Adèle* both extend beyond that point, the latter substantially. In *Nathalie*, indeed, Kavanagh lightly mocks that tradition - “We know that a tale has, properly speaking, no right to extend beyond that fiat of a heroine’s destiny, called marriage . . .”).^[34] Kavanagh criticises the second part of *A Simple Story* primarily for its weak moral and the unacceptable changes in the character of the main protagonists. Nevertheless, Kavanagh credits Inchbald with creating a new type of heroine, “a graceful embodiment of woman’s failings held out, not to imitation or admiration, but to a surer and deeper feeling - sympathy”. She also admires Inchbald’s ability to tell her stories with “a repressed strength . . . as if we witnessed some great, pent up agony, which broke the heart from which it could not escape”.

Maria Edgeworth gives Kavanagh a fellow Irishwoman to consider, one, moreover, with a continuing degree of celebrity. For Kavanagh there was also her personal difficulty over Edgeworth’s submissive relationship to her father; “We doubt whether his direct influence improved his celebrated daughter; we think we can trace many of her faults to Richard Lovell Edgeworth”. To his credit, however, Kavanagh ascribes the development of an active attitude in his daughter. “Nature has set a difference” argues Kavanagh, “and a great one, between man and woman, but education has set one still greater . . . [boys] are trained to act a part in life, and a part worth acting, whilst girls are . . . taught to look on life”. Kavanagh repeats her view (first advanced *Woman in France in the Eighteenth Century*) that French women had been at an advantage over those of other nations because their culture allowed them to act. In Edgeworth’s case, her father encouraged her to similar attitudes. With Mr Edgeworth’s death, his daughter’s literary career ceased. “We cannot help thinking that Miss Edgeworth wronged herself in relying so much even on the best and wisest of critics . . . had he died when she was younger . . . we should have had another Miss Edgeworth . . .

infinitely more tender and amiable than the one we know." (II, p.101). Kavanagh records Scott's great admiration, and the fact that Edgeworth's work provided him with a model for *Waverley*.

Edgeworth, for Kavanagh, exemplifies a further quality of the woman novelist, the moral teacher. Unlike de Scudéry and de Genlis, however, Edgeworth employed ridicule. To achieve this, she had to deny her characters moral stature, giving rise to criticism that Edgeworth did not value such ideals. Kavanagh defends her, arguing that her personal values were clear from the vigour with which she attacked their lack. Indeed, claims Kavanagh impishly, the demands which Edgeworth placed by implication on her heroes and heroines were great - "prudence, justice, honour, principle and every virtue under heaven" (II, p.118).

Kavanagh chooses Edgeworth's practical, prosaic attitudes to romantic love to explore further women writers' contribution to the quality of truth in the novel. She argues that breadth of truth in a writer is the measure of genius. In this, for Kavanagh, Edgeworth was exceeded only by Austen. Her utilitarian attitudes, however, meant that truths she did not find useful were filtered out, giving an element of coldness where pedagogic intent won the day. In Kavanagh's estimation, Edgeworth's literary skill had enabled her to maintain a reputation, albeit diminished from her own day; many of the lessons she sought to inculcate had, however, lost their impetus for Kavanagh's contemporaries.

Kavanagh judges *Castle Rackrent* an "able but unpleasing tale, and "dreary in the extreme, with all its power" (II, p.122). If uncongenial to Kavanagh's taste, she regards it as Edgeworth's greatest Irish story, "and on her Irish stories her ultimate fame must rest". It is, she is forced to conclude, a matter for regret that it was the only such tale Edgeworth wrote, for, she judges, Edgeworth "had far more talent for truth than for invention: in this she is never at her ease; her best attempts bear the traces of labour and effort (II p.134).

Belinda Kavanagh regards as an artificial union of a moral tale with the incidents of a novel, though more felicitous in this instance than elsewhere in Edgeworth's works. With *Tales of Fashionable Life*, Kavanagh finds Edgeworth the moralist triumphant; its characters she finds

unreal embodiments of particular qualities, which the skill of Edgeworth's depictions alone allows readers to forgive. Kavanagh criticises a blinkered aspect to Edgeworth's moral vision, seeing oppression as the fault only of individuals, and ignoring the social values that admit it. She adds a rare political comment: "Why should the possession of large landed estates imply such terrible power? ... The question was one day put in France, and the whole world knows how it was answered" (II, p.169).

In the concluding page of *English Women of Letters*, Kavanagh writes in summary "Miss Austen alone enjoys no diminution of fame", a conclusion matched by the extensive treatment she gives to an author for whose life she gleans little information. Kavanagh, whose own literary tastes are so pronounced, records what she knows of Austen's with obvious puzzlement, her taste for Johnson, dislike of Fielding's coarseness, and boredom with Richardson. The biographical details are quickly dispensed with, and Kavanagh finds time to consider all six of Austen's novels.

For Kavanagh, Austen epitomises a prime contribution of the women novelist, Delicacy - capitalized thus. This she couples with Tenderness and Sympathy. At least one of these is, Kavanagh insists, present in any novel of merit written by a woman; even Aphra Behn, devoid of "delicacy of intellect or of heart" had Sympathy. Austen's delicacy is, for Kavanagh, distinctive; she applies her attention to character and human nature rather than intellect. Kavanagh further asserts a difference in approach; where de Scudéry analysed, Austen painted. Kavanagh, remarks that Austen is "not an effective writer", meaning that she displays character for the reader's judgement rather than seeking to affect it directly. She adds that "never has character been displayed in such delicate variety as in her tales; never have commonplace men and women been invested with such reality" (II, pp. 190-191). Given the value Kavanagh gives to truth, it is probably the highest compliment she can pay. Kavanagh describes Austen's range of vision as limited, but penetrating to the point where she describes her as not creating or inventing, but "seeing". To this was added a technical gift; she knew, says Kavanagh, "where to stop", to say no more than was needed.

Austen, in Kavanagh's view, deals with the middle ground, neither the great, nor the wicked, but the commonplace. This lends truth - "Life as we see it around us is not cast in sorrow or in mirth

... but a strange compound in which commonplace acts a far more striking part than heroic events or comic incidents." The concomitant fault is a tameness which, for Kavanagh is itself unnatural.

Kavanagh remarks that Austen refuses to build "any romantic ideal of love, virtue or sorrow" (II, p.193), and was perhaps at fault in her ironic attitude towards the natural human impulse to do so.

Occasionally, for Kavanagh, Austen's sense of reality slipped; she sees in the Dashwood sisters of *Sense and Sensibility* an over-theoretical division between Judgement and Imagination, the victory of Sense weakened by being too obviously the result of the author's will. Kavanagh, as usual, discusses the plotting of each novel in some detail, with some interesting observations, such as her view that the "silent torture of an unloved woman", Anne Elliot in *Persuasion*, is a theme which was not to be taken up again until *Jane Eyre*; it is, she says, the only genuinely sad novel by Austen. Kavanagh was, perhaps, aware of Charlotte Brontë's lack of enthusiasm for Austen when she remarks, in summary, that her ability to fashion a story from such unexceptional people and limited incident was one that injured her with many readers, a suggestion perhaps truer in Kavanagh's own day than today.

A disadvantage for Victorian readers, attuned to judgemental narrators, was that Austen's characters show themselves by their speech or actions, rather than commentary. Kavanagh's overall view of Austen was not uncritical; she finds her reluctant to express strong feelings clearly, making for some blandness of tone, giving as much emphasis to a ball as a seduction or death. Kavanagh herself is aligned to contemporary values, undervaluing the way in which denial of a strong authorial voice forces readers to supply their own personal response.

Kavanagh's penultimate author is Amelia Opie. Kavanagh describes her unconventionally free upbringing, interest in the law, and friendships with radicals. She soon gravitated to literary circles, and Kavanagh suspects Godwin of an amorous attachment to her - among many other literary young women! - before her marriage to Opie. A slow divorcement from that society followed the deaths of her husband and father, and an increasing contentment with Quaker life in Norwich. Kavanagh is clear that Opie succeeded "by qualities distinct from those called literary, or, better still, intellectual" (II, p. 268), criticising her style, intellectual capacities and character drawing. She

had, says Kavanagh, only one gift, "she knew how to appeal to the heart". Her stories, Kavanagh contends, were unoriginal, cobbled together from the staples of popular novels, but they were accessible to a wide readership and had a continuing power, with their odd mixture of the instinctive with the merely melodramatic.

Indeed Opie's work is so derivative that the heroine of *Adeline Mowbray; or Mother and Daughter*, has a name which combines two characters in Charlotte Smith's *Emmeline*, while, Kavanagh notes, the plot has much of the life of Godwin and Mary Wollstonecraft in it. Kavanagh is clearly discomfited by its theme of union without marriage rites, but commends Opie's ability to show human greatness convincingly. Opie's religious novels, Kavanagh rejects; Opie, she argues, was only successful when true to her own approach, and these works offer no opportunity for the pathos of which she was master.

Kavanagh attaches more importance than current literary opinion would accept to Lady Morgan (although *The Wild Irish Girl* was reprinted in 1986 for the first time in many years). Morgan's reputation had both a literary and a personal basis. She was, in fact, a celebrity, of a theatrical Anglo-Irish parentage. After two false starts, the young Sydney Owenson produced *The Wild Irish Girl*. Immediately popular and remunerative, the novel, as Kavanagh notes, attracted controversy which was "not inexplicable. Lady Morgan was essentially an aggressive writer". The *Wild Irish Girl* Kavanagh describes as a very "young" book, faulty, but with a zest and freshness which made it an immediate success. Its sincerity Kavanagh identifies as a special contribution of the female novelist, allied, in this instance, with fervour. That fervour was allied to the Irish cause, calling forth from Kavanagh a digression on the vicissitudes of the great families of Ireland. She notes Morgan's investment of characters, rather than scenery, with the aura of romance. This, Kavanagh argues, risked ridicule, only avoided through Morgan's patent sincerity. Kavanagh considers Glorvina a new style of heroine, combining intelligence and joyousness with an ardour of spirit.

Kavanagh is cutting about some of Morgan's other novels; *The Missionary* she dismisses as "a rhapsody in three volumes". *O'Donnel*, however, Kavanagh finds significant, as an antecedent to

the national novel of *Waverley*, though she thinks Morgan fails to maintain the conception of her hero. With less idealised characters such as Lady Singleton and Miss O'Hallaran, she finds Morgan, attempting to portray what she called "the flat realities of life", more successful. Such characters, however, were, as Kavanagh remarks apropos of *Florence Macarthy*, rarely developed; they are "though not superficial, ... external" (II, p. 345). Morgan presents difficulties for Kavanagh; successful as she was, she exhibited characteristics at odds with Kavanagh's female tradition. She lacked, in Kavanagh's assessment, serenity; "attack is the meaning of all she wrote".

It is a difficult ending for Kavanagh's attempt to characterise a tradition of women's novels, and unsurprisingly, her coda to this final chapter is short. She asks how many of her twenty authors (taking the French with the English) will have left one book that will live. But the final words are hopeful; though fiction is, she remarks, "like Saturn, devouring its own children" (II, p. 353) and her chosen authors largely unread, "we cannot open a novel of to-day on which these past and faded novelists have not left their trace. And . . . that trace, however fine and invisible, is worthy of attention and record". Perhaps the same can be said, in a small way, of Julia Kavanagh.

Notes

- [1] Kavanagh, Julia, *French Women of Letters: Biographical Sketches* (London, Hurst and Blackett, 1862) 2 vols. Vol I, "Introduction" pp. 1-2.
- [2] Having made this statement, it is amusing to find that Kavanagh nevertheless finds it incumbent on herself to indulge in a short survey of older literature, perhaps to remind the reader that this woman writer at least had a sufficiently wide acquaintance with literary history to put her arguments into a wider context. She cites Homer, Chaucer, Spenser, Shakespeare, Tasso and Heliodorus, as well as reminding her readers of the ancient contribution of women such as Marie de France, Hrosvita and Christine de Pisan. She also charts the introduction of greater realism in the works of the Renaissance Italians and the picaro tradition founded by Mendoza, the revival of pastoral, and the growing use of the latter as a metaphor for current events.
- [3] e.g. John Lyly (1554-1606) with *Euphues, the Anatomy of Wit* (1578) and *Euphues, his England* (1580);

Thomas Lodge (1558?) - 1625) *Rosalynde, Euphues Golden Legacie* (1590); and Thomas Nashe (1567-1601) *The Unfortunate Traveller, or the Life of Jacke Wilton* (1594)

- [4] Julia Kavanagh *French Women of Letters: Biographical Sketches* (London, 1861) Vol. 1, p. 36.
- [5] Collected in *L'Ombre* (1626) and *Les Avis ou les Présens* (1634). De Gournay's contemporary position was such that she appears in Saint Évremond's satirical *Comédie des Académistes*.
- [6] It should be noted that the novels of Madeleine de Scudéry were actually published under the name of her elder brother Georges, though it appears she took significantly the greater part in their composition.
- [7] There are recent evidences that Kavanagh's attempt at partial restoration of de Scudéry's position in the literary canon does, to an extent, anticipate a restoration of that reputation by feminist literary critics of recent years. Joan DeJean's *Tender Geographies: Women and the Origins of the Novel in France* (New York and Oxford, Columbia University Press, 1991) devotes considerable attention to the influence of de Scudéry and the *société précieuse*, as well as reflecting in its title de Scudéry's Map of Tenderness. (Incidentally it gives something of the same degree of significance to the influence of Lafayette and de Staël.) This is not to imply that Kavanagh, within the limitations of her wide-ranging survey, necessarily had access to the fullest information about her subjects; she ignores the later *histoires* and *nouvelles* which receive attention from modern scholars. An accessible recent full-length treatment of de Scudéry is that by Nicole Aronson (*Mademoiselle de Scudéry* (Boston, Twayne's World Authors Series, 1978)). Again, there is evidence that Kavanagh's estimate of de Scudéry's significance, characteristics and faults has stood the test of time, though she goes unmentioned in Aronson's bibliography. The treatment of the *nouvelles* and *histoires* such as *Célinde* (1661), *Mathilde d'Avilar* and *La Promenade de Versailles* (1669) suggests one comparison with Kavanagh's work of which the later author was probably unaware; de Scudéry displayed an ability to follow the changing tastes of her time.
- [8] Samuel Pepys' diary for 12 May 1666 demonstrates the attitudes of both camps, when he describes checking his wife for her long stories from *Le Grand Cyrus*. Kavanagh quotes (p. 60) from a letter from Madame de Sévigny to her daughter: "Mademoiselle de Scudéry has just sent me two small volumes of *Conversations*; they cannot but be good when they are not drowned in her great novel".
- [9] In fairness, it must be noted that there is evidence that Georges was, in part at least, probably acceding to his sister's own wishes in this matter. Her sense of the high place her family had once occupied in society was always strong, and the subject of some satirical remarks, and there is a remark by her fictional alter ego, Sapho, in *Le Grand Cyrus*, Book X, which may well express the writer's own attitudes: "There is nothing

more unpleasant than to be a woman of letters and be treated as one when one is of noble birth". Kavanagh does not allude to this possibility, since in both her time and our own, there is no doubt that such a view appears extreme; nevertheless, in the highly formal coded society of the "Precieuses", such a stance implied a high moral position.

- [10] There may, indeed, be a slight element of amazement at de Scudéry's ability to spin out her monstrous catalogue of incident; there is little doubt that, after *Nathalie* and until *Adèle*, Kavanagh had considerable difficulty in achieving narrative cohesiveness within the voracious demands of the three volume format in which she was forced to work. The relative narrative drive of *Rachel Grey* and the one-and-a-half-volume title story of the *Seven Years and other tales* collection suggest that Kavanagh found the form, well-paid as it was, difficult, though she became better able to handle it as her career progressed.
- [11] Such an observation is, of course, one which has more than the moral dimension which de Scudéry principally intended; as practising authors, both de Scudéry, who originally wrote it, and Kavanagh who thought it worth recording, were equally aware of the difficulties of inventing conversation which bears an appearance of reality yet carries forward the intention of the author!
- [12] Kavanagh had made significant use of the maxims in establishing the character of de Sainville in *Nathalie, a tale* (London, Colburn, 1850), though the degree to which many of her English readers would be aware of the nature of those maxims, and their origin in a disappointed love affair with no possible future must have been uncertain.
- [13] This comment by Kavanagh is the closest she comes to any recognition of the potential for collaboration implicit in the French salons of the seventeenth century. At least one modern critic has taken the suggestion further; Jacques Lacretelle, in his article on La Rochefoucauld in Gide, A. *La Littérature Française: XVIIe, XVIII siècles* (Gallimard, 1939) suggests that La Rochefoucauld was the primary author of *The Princess of Clèves*. His reasoning, however, is based on the premise that the story is constructed against a series of "notional" maxims, which are then illustrated by incidents. Even accepting such a premise, it would be likely that the long friendship of the two would have some influence on literary and moral attitudes.
- [14] The last edition of *Zayde* appeared, however, only 35 years before Kavanagh was writing.
- [15] Quoted in Scott, J.W., *Madame de Lafayette: La Princesse de Clèves* (London, Grant and Cutler 1983) p. 9. At p. 11, Scott notes that the work begins virtually with marriage, ends with refusal and violation and can even be interpreted as implying that the "right" man does not exist.
- [16] Not all of Kavanagh's comments on *La Princesse de Clèves* are on this high note; her sense of humour breaks

through with her straight-faced comment on de la Fayette's brisk treatment of the death of M. de Clèves:
 "People died simply when Madame de la Fayette wrote, and their end could be thus simply told in a few words, without idle appeals to effect, or even to pity. And surely it was better thus." (Vol. 1, p. 243).

- [17] While Kavanagh has considerable force in what she claims, it is curious that she does not make much of the development of self-knowledge which characterises de la Fayette's treatment of Madame de Clèves, and which is one of the most crucial aspects of the modern novel. Indeed, not only this element of knowledge, but the unexpectedly developed technique which de la Fayette finds to display it, is remarkable; the way in which Madame de Clèves comes to realise the true extent of her feelings for Nemours foreshadows that by which, in 1878, Tolstoy managed the same thing in *Anna Karenina*.
- [18] Kavanagh notes that it was her attempt to discuss politics with the Regent that may have cost de Tencin the possibility of becoming the Regent's mistress. (*French Women of Letters*, V.1, pp. 264-265)
- [19] This comment, perhaps, gives a clue to why the bilingual Kavanagh apparently chose to write only in English.
- [20] In his introduction to a quartet of French 18th century novels *Quatre Romans dans le goût français* (Paris, 1959), Claude Roy argues that *Memoirs of Comminge* demonstrates the continuity of the tradition of *La Princesse de Clèves*, though Luigi Denlar, in *Saggio sui Memoires du Comte de Comminge di Claudine de Tencin* (Milan, 1959), while recognising the structural debt to the earlier work, finds that the Corneillan ethos of de la Fayette has been replaced by a romantic sensibility, and also suggests a foreshadowing of the "roman noir". (see Brooks R.A. op. cit. supra)
- [21] There has been some work on Madame Riccoboni's correspondence: James C. Nicholls (ed.) *Madame Riccoboni's letters to David Hume, David Garrick, and Sir Robert Liston 1764-1783* (Oxford, Voltaire Foundation, 1974). This suggests that Kavanagh's comments (Vol. 1, p. 300) about Riccoboni's distance from the intellectual centres of her day may be exaggerated, though the selection suggests a closer familiarity with British society than French.
- [22] Kavanagh, Julia, *English Women of Letters* (London, Hurst and Blackett, 1863) 2 vols. Vol. 1, p. 25.
- [23] *ibid.* Vol. 1 p. 29.
- [24] *ibid.* Vol. 1 p. 7.
- [25] *ibid.* Vol. 1 p. 1.
- [26] This judgement that finds modern echoes in for example, Ian Watt's *The Rise of the Novel*, (Harmondsworth,

1983) (albeit with a more explicit definition of his grounds) and, Frederick R. Karl's *Reader's Guide to the development of the English Novel in the Eighteenth Century* (London, 1975) which places a number of significant prose fictions outside the scope of the novel form.

[27] Kavanagh, Julia, *English Women of Letters* (London, Hurst and Blackett, 1863) 2 vols. Vol.1 p. 4.

[28] *ibid.* Vol.1 p. 50.

[29] *ibid.* Vol.1 p. 58.

[30] *ibid.* Vol.1 p. 57.

[31] *ibid.* Vol.1 p. 58.

[32] *ibid.* Vol.1 p. 94.

[33] There is now some evidence that Radcliffe borrowed from the earlier works of Charlotte Smith, in her use of scenery, and the other writer duly borrowed back, but Kavanagh does not refer to, and may not have known of this.

[34] Kavanagh, Julia, *Nathalie, A Tale* (London, Colburn, 1850) 1st edition, Vol III, p. 310.

Chapter 5: Contemporary Views of Kavanagh.

The career of Julia Kavanagh was, in commercial terms, apparently a successful one, and for much of its length also critically successful. Before considering the bulk of her work, the fiction, it is useful to place her career in context by referring to contemporary sources. For the earliest days of her career, it is useful to trace the distant, but cordial, relationship with the most influential woman writer of the day, Charlotte Brontë. For the end of Kavanagh's career, the obituaries following her death and the article in the *Irish Monthly* by Mrs Charles Martin provide some insight into her declined, but still respectable reputation. The somewhat slighting references to her in later years have been commented on earlier.

Both sets of sources must obviously be treated with some care; the Brontë comments have to be seen in the light of a degree of personal sympathy for the young woman's plight which Brontë expresses following correspondence with William Smith Williams. Obituaries, on the other hand, would be constrained by respect for the dead. With those limitations in mind, however, both sources give a degree of insight into the reception given to both the earlier and the final phases of Kavanagh's career.

Over a number of years, the careers of Charlotte Brontë and Julia Kavanagh intertwined. When *Jane Eyre* was published in 1847 to immediate success, Kavanagh had published no novels, but was already making a living as a writer. The first reference to her in Brontë's letters was concerned with Kavanagh as critic, not writer, and comes in a letter to W.S. Williams of Smith, Elder, dated 4th January 1848. Much of the early criticism of *Jane Eyre* arose from assertions of an anti-religious or immoral tone in the writings of 'Currer Bell'. Brontë writes:

Miss Kavanagh's view of the Maniac coincides with Leigh Hunt's. I agree with them that the character is shocking, but I know that it is but too natural.

The comment presumably refers to Mrs Rochester. At this time, Brontë, although she had experienced the moral lapses of the drunken or opium-taking Branwell, apparently had no knowledge of Kavanagh's circumstances, and that she too had her aberrant member of the family, in this case her father Morgan Kavanagh, who had abandoned care of his invalid wife Bridget into Julia's hands see Chapter 8.

Four weeks or so later, Brontë arranged for a copy of the second edition of *Jane Eyre* to be sent to Kavanagh, with an accompanying note:

Fby 2nd 1848

Dear Madam, - 'Jane Eyre' is but a defective production, yet I dare say that whatever merit it has will be appreciated by you; of its faults too, you will be a competent judge: you had a right, therefore, to possess a copy. I only wish it had been in my power to offer you some less insipid token of esteem than a novel which has already undergone perusal. With sincere wishes for the success of your own undertakings, -
I remain, my dear madam, yours sincerely, CURRER BELL.

There seems to be a possibility that, at this point, Williams had outlined Kavanagh's personal circumstances to Brontë. The letters between Williams and Brontë contained much literary gossip. Certainly, by 9th March 1848, he had apparently outlined the basis of Kavanagh's *Madeleine* to Brontë, since she comments on the plot in a letter to him on that date^[1]. The first part of the letter deals with a review from the *Church of England Quarterly Review* which, although not entirely critical, expressed some reservations about what it called 'the tendency' of *Jane Eyre*.

Brontë comments, slightly satirically:

I trust Miss Kavanagh's work will meet with the success that, from your account, I am certain she and it deserve. I think I have met with an outline of the facts on which her tale is founded in some periodical, 'Chambers' Journal' I believe^[2]. No critic, however rigid, will find fault with 'the tendency' of her work, I should think.

Taking her cue from Kavanagh's obviously Francophile views, Brontë goes on to muse:-

I will tell you why you cannot sympathise fully with the French, or feel any firm confidence in their future movements: because too few of them are Lamartines, too many Ledru Rollins. That, at least, is my reason for watching their proceedings with more dread than hope.

During 1848, there appears to have been some unexpected delay in the publication of *Madeleine*; it is not until 2nd November that Brontë wrote to Williams:-

I am glad, by the bye, to hear that 'Madeleine' is come out at last, and was happy to see a favourable notice of that work, and of 'The Three Paths' in the 'Morning Herald.' I wish Miss Kavanagh all success."

That wish, though kind, is cool and detached; at the time, Brontë had not read *Madeleine*, and appears to be responding politely to an interest shown by Williams. Three weeks later however, after a parcel of books had arrived from Smith, Elder, the reaction was different. Although in considerable distress because of Emily's rapidly declining health at this time, Charlotte commented on 22 November 1848:-

I have read 'Madeleine'. It is a fine pearl in simple setting. Julia Kavanagh has my esteem; I would rather know her than many far more brilliant personages. Somehow my heart leans more to her than to Eliza Lynn, for instance.

At some later point - possibly Williams had passed on to her Brontë's complimentary remarks - Kavanagh perhaps suggested to Williams that she should reciprocate the gift from Brontë. For his part, Williams appears to have made something of the kind known to Brontë, which would account for the comment in Brontë's letter to Williams of 4 February 1849:-

I have kept 'Madeleine' along with the other two books I mentioned; I shall consider it the gift of Miss Kavanagh and shall value it both for its literary excellence and for the modest merit of the giver.

By May of that year, Charlotte Brontë was planning to take the rapidly declining Anne to Scarborough, but still found time to respond to an apparent mention by Williams of Kavanagh:- "I was glad, too, to hear of the progress and welfare of Miss Kavanagh."

The death of Anne at Scarborough hit Brontë hard; on 25th June 1849, just after she had returned to the Parsonage alone, Williams, whether at Kavanagh's prompting is impossible to determine, had evidently enquired whether Miss Brontë would accept a letter from Kavanagh.

Charlotte's response was fierce and brusque:-

I by no means ask Miss Kavanagh to write to me - Why should she trouble herself to do it? What claim have I on her? She does not know me - she cannot care for me except vaguely and on hearsay. I have got used to your friendly sympathy and it comforts me - I have tried and trust the fidelity of one or two other friends and I lean upon it - The natural affection of my father and the affection and solicitude of our two servants are precious and consolatory to me - but I do not look around for general pity - conventional condolence I do not want - either from man or woman.

By March of the following year, Brontë's grief was by no means spent, but she felt the need for books to close out the silent emptiness of the Parsonage. She wrote to Williams on 19 March 1850 about her feelings when opening the latest parcel from Cornhill, of her memories of "those who once looked on so eagerly". One of the books was Kavanagh's *Woman in France in the Eighteenth Century*.

In June that year, Charlotte Brontë met Kavanagh for the only recorded time, while staying in London. Writing to Ellen Nussey on 12 June 1850, she records the meeting in some detail, and incidentally reveals for the first time some of the information that Williams must have given her about Kavanagh's circumstances:-

Another likeness I have seen too that touched me sorrowfully.^[3] Do you remember my speaking of a Miss Kavanagh - a young authoress who supported her mother by her writings? Hearing from Mr Williams that she had a longing to see me I called on her yesterday - I found a little, almost dwarfish figure to which even I had to look down - not deformed - that is - not hunchbacked but long armed with a large head and (at first sight) a strange face. She met me half-frankly, half tremblingly; we sat down together and when I talked to her for five minutes that face was no longer strange but mournfully familiar - It was Martha Taylor^[4] in every lineament - I shall try to find a moment to see her again. She lives in a poor but clean and neat little lodging - her mother seems a somewhat

weak-minded woman who can be no companion to her - her father has quite deserted his wife and child -and this poor little feeble, intelligent, cordial thing wastes her brain to gain a living. She is twenty-five years old.

Having met Kavanagh, Brontë 's instincts to help the young author seem to have been aroused, judging from the terms in which she wrote to Williams on 5th September 1850, though the nature of Williams' proposed action is not known:-

I trust your suggestion for Miss Kavanagh's benefit will have all success. It seems to me truly felicitous and excellent, and, I doubt not, she will think so too. The last class of female character will be difficult to manage: there will be nice points in it - yet, well managed, both an attractive and instructive book might result therefrom. One thing may be depended on in the execution of this plan Miss Kavanagh will commit no error, either of taste, judgement or principle; and even when she deals with the feelings, I would rather follow the calm course of her quiet plan than the flourishes of a more redundant one, where there is not strength to retain as well as ardour to repel.

The next mention of Kavanagh in Brontë 's correspondence is somewhat mysterious, since it refers to Kavanagh in connection with the publisher Newby, some seven years before Kavanagh's public dispute with the man over her father's novel *The Hobbies*. Newby had dealt shabbily with "Ellis and Acton Bell" over the publication of *Wuthering Heights* and *Agnes Grey*; Brontë had remarked waspishly to Williams on 10 November 1847 that "Mr Newby, however, does not do business like Messrs. Smith and Elder ... My relatives have suffered from exhausting delay and procrastination...". While editing her sisters' books for a second edition, Brontë was evidently seeking some payment from Newby in relation to the original publication (they had advanced £50 as a shared risk, and had received no repayment) and wrote to George Smith on 18 September 1850:-

If you should extract any money from Mr Newby (of which I am not sanguine), I shall regard it in the light of a providential windfall and dispose of part of it - at least - accordingly; one half of whatever you may realise must be retained in your possession to add to any sum you may decide on giving Miss Kavanagh for her next work. This, however, is a presumptuous enumeration of chickens ere the eggs are hatched."

Two days later, Brontë wrote to Williams:-

I am truly pleased too to learn that Miss Kavanagh has managed so well with Mr Colburn.

[5] Her position seems to me one deserving of all sympathy. I often think of her. Will her novel soon be published? Somehow, I expect it to be interesting.

By 9th November, Williams had told Brontë that *Woman in France* was published:- “I am truly glad to hear that Miss Kavanagh’s health is improved. You can send her book whenever it is most convenient.”

On January 21 1851, Brontë wrote to Kavanagh in Boulogne with a detailed critique of Kavanagh’s *Nathalie*, which she must have received from the author with a plea for her views:-

Jany 21st, 1851.

MY DEAR MISS KAVANAGH, - I fear you will have thought hard things of me ere this - pronounced me ungrateful - uncivil and I know not what, but the fact is I only received ‘Nathalie’ a few days since; she has been waiting in London to come down in a parcel with some other books. At last however I have made her acquaintance, read her through from title-page to ‘Finis’.

Now- do not expect me to criticise; of that ungenial office I wash my hands; it suffices for me to know and say that I was thoroughly interested and highly pleased. Your reader is made to realise places and persons; he becomes an inmate of the old chateau of Sainville, Normandy spreads green and cultured round him. Some of the minor characters - the Canoness, Mdle Dantin, the femme du chambre are by no means the least cleverly drawn. Rose Montelieu is excellent; I thought those passages which refer to her illness and death amongst the very best in the book. Nathalie’s perverseness as well as her final submission struck me as a little exaggerated - so did some of the other traits in M.de Sainville’s character - but I said I would not criticise; the contrast in their natures, and the kind of contrast is a happy thought; the mutual attraction to which it leads would - I doubt not, be exactly paralleled in nature and real life. In short I have to thank you for a treat; the work merits success, and the favourable notices which have been given by the various literary journals may I trust be taken as evidences that it has secured it.

I earnestly trust your health has been improved by change of air and scene; in England we have thus far had a peculiarly mild open winter; even here, in the North - no snow has yet fallen.

Perhaps ere this you may have left Boulogne; in that case I fear there is small chance of your receiving this note and thus my silence will remain unexplained. I must however trust to fortune and with every good wish for your health and happiness - I beg you to believe me, - Yours very sincerely,

C BRONTË.

In fact, *Nathalie* must have struck home to Brontë very sharply; the situations in the book must have seemed to echo memories of Brontë's own life, in a bewildering fashion. The continental schoolrooms in which the novel opens were familiar to Charlotte from her own stay in Brussels; the older man with whom Nathalie Montolieu falls in love could have re-awoken thoughts of M. Heger, while the decline and death of Nathalie's saintly and determinedly self-effacing sister Rose must have been fraught with recollections of both Emily and, especially, Anne Brontë. Among others, Shirley Foster has drawn attention to the resemblances which can be found in Brontë's last work, *Villette*, where she transformed the contents of her much-rejected *The Professor* in ways which strongly suggest the influence of Kavanagh's book^[6]. More than one comment had been made to the effect that *Nathalie* owed much to *Jane Eyre*; these are undoubtedly accurate, but here, the debt is repaid. It cannot be doubted that *Villette* is the greater novel, though *Nathalie* was conspicuously successful from its publication, and deserves recognition on its own merits. Nonetheless, it is at least questionable whether Brontë would have produced her book without the impetus of Kavanagh's novel. It appears that Brontë's final overcoming of the loss of creativity that had troubled her since she completed *Shirley* followed hard on the heels of her reading *Nathalie*.

It does, however, remain a matter for debate to what extent the impetus was given to Brontë by the unexpected personal relevance to her of the contents (including the loss of her sisters, which played no part in *Villette*), to what extent the integral merits of Kavanagh's work, and to what extent the realisation that Kavanagh's approach to the story offered a way of overcoming the technical problems Brontë had faced in her first attempt to deal with the materials of her Brussels experience.

The evidence of Brontë's letter quoted above suggests that a significant part of the book's impact on her stemmed from its merits as literature, but the way in which generally similar themes are expanded and transmogrified into a very individual work by Brontë suggest that it unlocked her imagination in a very personal and subjective fashion. So close were the resonances between *Nathalie* and Charlotte's own experiences that it becomes impossible to dissociate the two; certainly, there is every likelihood that Brontë was unaware of the extent to which she may have made use of Kavanagh's work.

By March 1852, Brontë had read Kavanagh's *Women of Christianity*. Though she records in a letter of 23 March to Ellen Nussey that she had given the book to Nussey's mother, she had evidently read it thoroughly, and generally approved it, though with a typical dislike of Kavanagh's pro-Catholic views. She wrote to Williams on 25 March 1852:-

I ought long since to have acknowledged the gratification with which I read Miss Kavanagh's 'Women of Christianity'. Her charity and (on the whole) her impartiality are very beautiful. She touches indeed with too gentle a hand the theme of Elizabeth of Hungary - and in her own mind - she evidently misconstrues the fact of Protestant Charities seeming to be fewer than Catholic. She forgot or does not know that Protestantism is a quieter creed than Romanism - as it does not clothe its priesthood in scarlet, so neither does it set up its good women for Saints, canonize their names and proclaim their good works - in the records of man their alms will not perhaps be found registered - but Heaven has its Account as well as Earth.

Sadly, the last comment on Kavanagh in an extant letter from Brontë is a critical one, ironically in a letter where she is concerned with unfavourable reviews of her own works. There may, of course, have been something uncongenial for the last of the Brontë children in a novel where a major character had given up her suitor in order to devote herself to her brother, when she must have wondered whether Branwell's conduct had shortened the lives of her sisters, especially Emily. Writing to Williams on 9th March 1853, she mentions:-

I have tried to read 'Daisy Burns'; at the close of the 1st Vol. I stopped. I must not give an account of it for it would seem severe. Miss Kavanagh's intentions are thoroughly good -

her execution in this case seems to me disastrous. 'Madeleine' her first quiet, unpretending book - is worth a hundred such tawdry deformities as 'Daisy Burns' - I find in it no real blood or life; it is painted and cold.

Thus we have a, perhaps biased, account of Kavanagh's earliest career by a formidably skilled novelist who influenced the younger woman profoundly. It is difficult to disagree with her dismay at the faults of Kavanagh's third novel, and it is likely that she would have been equally unimpressed by its successor. She was not, however, to see the recovery as Kavanagh learned her craft. Brontë's comments were never intended for publication, and for a more public assessment of Kavanagh's standing at this early stage of her career, we have Margaret Oliphant's substantial review of the state of the craft in her article "Modern Novelists - Great and Small"^[7]. She chooses to discuss Kavanagh immediately following her discussion of the impact of *Jane Eyre*, placing her effectively at the forefront of the imitators. While she describes Kavanagh as a "writer of considerable gifts", she remarks coolly that her work "from *Nathalie* to *Grace Lee* . . . has done little else than repeat the attractive story of this combat and conflict of love or war" (p. 559).

The faults of *Daisy Burns* and *Grace Lee* may have resulted in a dismissal of Kavanagh from critical expectations, and, for the rest of her career, there appear to have been no attempts at assessment of her work beyond the reviews of individual works until the obituaries and article published after the author's death. The two substantial obituaries (that in *The Times* is simply a repeat of that in *The Athenaeum*) give a picture of Kavanagh's standing at the close of her career. *The Academy* (1877, p. 449) describes her as "an accomplished novelist and a skilled writer of biography. Much of the obituary runs through the history of her output, describing *Adèle* and *Queen Mab* as "probably the most popular", and adding that "nearly all (of her novels) were republished and warmly welcomed in America". There is a hint of criticism in the final sentences:

If her novels were not distinguished for depth of thought or profound grasp of character, they were all remarkable for gracefulness of style and much poetic feeling. Of Julia Kavanagh, if of few other English female novelists, it may be emphatically said that she left "no line which dying she could wish to blot.

The obituary in *The Athenaeum* is simultaneously more revealing, in that it was written by C W Wood, a personal friend who could give some details of the death, and less so, in that it comes from a biased source, less likely to accept the general verdict of the literary world. For Wood, Kavanagh had “for upwards of a quarter of a century . . . maintained her place and rank among Englishwomen of letters”. Nevertheless, the final words in *The Academy*’s obituary find a close echo in Wood’s:

Her writing was quiet and simple in style, but pure and chaste, and characterized by the same high toned thought and morality that was part of the author’s own nature.

Wood sums up with a comment which still appears relevant in the context of Kavanagh’s output when he says that :

. . . the particular department of literature she has made her own - studies of French life and character by an Englishwoman more conversant with France than England - has lost its chief representative. Many authors write about French life; it is another thing to write really French stories. In this Julia Kavanagh could not fail to succeed, as she did succeed.

The final source of information on Kavanagh must also be treated with some reservations; the article in the *Irish Monthly* by Mrs Charles Martin^[8] has two drawbacks; the writer did not know Kavanagh, though she appears to have had access to friends of the author, and there is a certain polemic element in using Kavanagh as a role model for Irish Catholic women. Nevertheless it is also an indication of a successful and respected author.

Given the general tone of the obituaries and the *Irish Monthly* article, it is clear that, despite some falling off in expectations of Kavanagh as her career progressed, she remained a popular and effective novelist. The following chapters will concentrate on a limited number of these works - *Madeleine*, which remained in print for many years, *Nathalie*, the first three-volume work after she had been influenced by Brontë, *Adèle*, probably her most accomplished work in that genre, and *Rachel Gray*, her apparently most personal work. Other works may be referred to in passing, but most references to these will be concentrated into the chapter on some typical themes in Kavanagh’s works.

Notes

- [1] This is, perhaps, curious; that novel was being published by Bentley, though Williams may have already been in touch with Kavanagh about *Woman in France in the Eighteenth Century*, which was to be published by Smith, Elder.
- [2] Probably Kavanagh's anonymous article on the Montyon Prizes.
- [3] Brontë had remarked on a fancied resemblance between G.H.Lewes and her dead sister Emily.
- [4] The school friend of Charlotte's who died in Brussels on 12 October 1842 ; Mary and Martha Taylor were probably the originals of the Yorke sisters in *Shirley*.
- [5] A reference to *Nathalie: A Tale*, published by Colburn that year.
- [6] Foster, Shirley ' "A suggestive book": A source for *Villette*' in *Études Anglaises* T.XXXV, No.2 (1982) pp. 177-184. Foster concentrates on those elements of *Nathalie* which have a direct counterpart in *Villette*; as a result, she does not assess the likely impact of the scenes of Rose Montolieu's Christian faith during her death, which, although they must have reminded Brontë of the circumstances of Anne's death, have no echo in her novel.
- [7] *Blackwoods Edinburgh Magazine* 77:554-568. (May 1855).
- [8] Vol. VI, p. 96.

Chapter 6: *Madeleine: A Tale of Auvergne*.

There lies, in many creative artists, the potential for development in more than one direction. In some cases, many activities prove fruitful; for others, alternatives are abandoned, and talents are concentrated on a single area. If Mrs Oliphant's assessment of Julia Kavanagh were correct (see Chapter 5) her novels, at least, would seem to be a continued re-working of a fairly limited subject area. Oliphant's remark that all Kavanagh's books from *Nathalie* to *Grace Lee* were "so many reflections of *Jane Eyre*" serves, in addition to its overt meaning, to remind that no writer exists in a cultural vacuum, preserved from the influence of other artists or of changing fashions, though their responses to those influences may be marked by a logic of personal development.

The most influential writers are often characterised by an individual vision which is reflected in their work. Because that individuality influences others, however, it incurs a cost, one that is borne not by major writers themselves, but by their lesser contemporaries. The latter, in succumbing to the power of the vision of greater contemporaries, stand in danger of becoming subsumed within the artistic and commercial success of others. While powerful examples can stimulate other artists they can sidetrack potentially personal visions in others. Such, it is tempting to hypothesise, may have been the fate of Julia Kavanagh.

Kavanagh's first adult novel, *Madeleine*^[1], was written independently of any discernible outside influence. Her second novel, *Nathalie*,^[2] on the other hand, clearly attempts (with considerable contemporary success) to create fiction on the model of Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre*. As Oliphant points out, it was the later book which provided the template for the bulk of Kavanagh's later fiction. Indeed, Kavanagh only once returned to a similar genre to *Madeleine* with her 1856

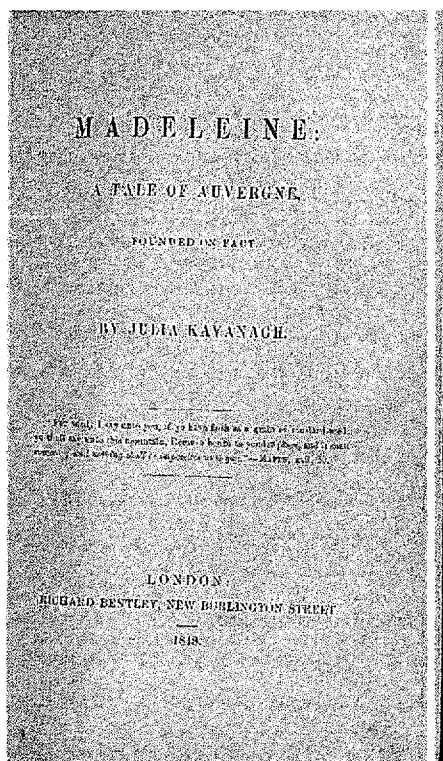
novel *Rachel Gray*. With this solitary (and, as will be demonstrated in Chapter 9, unusually personal) exception a distinctive note was lost in Kavanagh's work. Though *Madeleine* was the first novel by a very young writer, with many of the limits which that implies, it is a distinctive work, and the existence of *Rachel Gray* suggests that it was the result of of an identifiably individual approach to the novel. It was, essentially, a work reflecting both Kavanagh's unusual upbringing, and her strong religious and moral attitudes. That it had only a single successor (though certain of the short stories suggest that Kavanagh's interest in such subjects never completely waned) seems largely due to the impact of *Jane Eyre* on the fledgling novelist. Nevertheless, the nature of the heroine in *Madeleine* suggests reasons for the change in Kavanagh's subject matter. Madeleine Guérin is a plain, poor, retiring young woman with some affinities to her creator whose story reflects that creator's interests and attitudes. Much the same could be said of *Jane Eyre*. What Brontë's novel seems to have given Kavanagh was a different vision of the potential of such a figure, though the artistic merits and the commercial impact of *Jane Eyre* must also have been influential. The love between Jane and Rochester was not the only aspect of the novel which gained it a readership; it was equally the startling integrity and determination of the heroine that attracted comment. For Kavanagh, this must have produced a piquant mixture of self identification with Jane; like her, she was plain, poor, and thrown on her own resources, and like her she was prepared to fight. The possibility of a Rochester must have seemed unlikely to Kavanagh's rational mind, yet, if the trend of many of her novels were to be taken as a guide to the character of their author, rather than to her commercial acumen, such a love may have been a faint, persistent day dream in a hard life.

Madeleine: A Tale of Auvergne, founded on fact, to give it its full title, was neither a major nor an influential work, but it was one of genuine individuality, and was by no means undeserving of its success. It found many admirers, including Charlotte Brontë, and is an impressive work for a 24-year-old, whose only previous book was *The Three Paths*, a children's story. The circumstances under which she was writing were not easy, even for a more established writer. Those circumstances - poverty, abandonment, and the need to look after her mother - would tend to polarise quality; many feeble imitations of popular successes were produced by such single Victorian women. Mediocrity,

which demanded certain pains of the author without the stimulus of a genuine commitment to writing, was a less likely result. Talented and committed writers, however, might be spurred to good work in defiance of circumstances. That *Madeleine* is well written speaks volumes for Kavanagh's integrity; that it is simultaneously almost ostentatiously individual, even idiosyncratic, is more surprising. First novels are not necessarily autobiographical, but writers do learn their craft while drawing on the resources of their own experience. *Madeleine* has no element of *autobiography* though the heroine had a real-life original. Nevertheless, Kavanagh's own personality is central to the work since it is informed throughout by the structure of her deep religious beliefs, her experience of French life, and, probably, her political views. We can be certain that the moral attitudes of the novel are closely allied to Kavanagh's own, rather than a fictional construct, because they correspond in many respects with opinions which she expresses in her non-fiction works, particularly *Woman in France in the Eighteenth Century* and *Women of Christianity*. Indeed, the consonance between Kavanagh's fiction and non-fiction goes still further, since the real-life woman who provided the rough model for the fictional *Madeleine* can be found briefly recorded in *Women of Christianity* and in the *Montyon Prizes* pamphlet.

It cannot be said that *Madeleine* wholly ignored the dictates of popular taste; a huge proportion of the output of Victorian presses was devoted to theology and religious works. Some of this work was cast in fictional form, but much of this was didactic, at the expense of narrative. *Madeleine*, however, is principally a novel. Vineta Colby criticises Kavanagh as tending to stop her story to make moral points,^[3] but in comparison to those contemporary fictions intended for moral improvement, this is minor. For the most part, Kavanagh has the confidence to let the story speak for itself, without pausing to preach. Nevertheless, considered in bare outline, *Madeleine* could be taken for pious catholic hagiography. *Madeleine* begins with the eponymous peasant girl committing herself to a celibate life, going to the aid of a dying woman at risk to her own life, progressively taking on a motley collection of decrepit old people and social outcasts, risking her life to save a family dying of the plague, and then enduring a life of wretched struggle to buy and fit out a hospital

for the elderly and abandoned of her village. At the end, the purpose of her life fulfilled,



Title page of the first edition of *Madeleine*, 1848

Madeleine dies and is mourned by all. It is a wretchedly bathetic skeleton for a book, despite the fact of its origins, admittedly much altered, in real life. The book was, according to Wolff, originally to have borne the title “Jeanne”, pointing up more closely the origins of the heroine in her real-life counterpart.^[4] Kavanagh’s achievement is that she produces an affecting work from all this, one which bears the marks neither of the pulpit or the potboiler.

Real life has rarely the structure which a writer can impose upon a novel, and the efforts of Jeanne Jugan, still unfinished, provided Kavanagh with materials which still required substantial modification to fit the

needs of fiction. That modification had, however, to remain as true to the spirit and ethos of the woman as Kavanagh could manage. The decision to remove the scene of the action from the populous area of Brittany around St. Malo to the remoteness of the Auvergne, and to set it back at the beginning of the century, ending with the death of the heroine, gave Kavanagh freedoms which a slavish adherence to the original would have denied her, yet it is apparent that it is the spirit of the ill-educated peasant girl who devoted her life to the poor, the old and the sick which anchors Kavanagh’s work and gives it unity. Because she keeps close to many of the real-life events of Jugan’s life, the fictional story develops through unexpected bursts of activity rather than following the more tightly developed plot favoured in the nineteenth century. By accident, this sometimes gives the work an unexpectedly modern tone which is reinforced by the working class milieu. There is no love interest, no hero, and no traditionally “happy ending”. Nevertheless, it seems probable, given the novel’s tone, that Kavanagh would have disputed any contention that Madeleine’s lonely death at

the end of the book represents an unhappy climax; it is, above all, as she makes clear, the record of a life fulfilled

Though *Madeleine* stood a little apart from the typical novel of the period, the basis of that difference is often more subtle than first appears. The religious element in the novel is important, but can be misleading. Although Madeleine Guérin, the heroine, is, like her creator, profoundly religious, she differs from a characteristic subject of the religious tracts and works of the early Victorian period by her comparative ignorance of the detailed dogma of her religion. There is no attempt by her to draw morals from scriptures; indeed, Kavanagh goes to considerable lengths to make it clear that Madeleine knows little of such things; Madeleine:

“had read but two books in all her life, an abridgement of sacred history and her prayer-book”.^[5]

Madeleine is portrayed in appearance and in attitudes as someone having many of the characteristics of a religieuse, though the hospital she founds is, despite her own views, a secular establishment. Throughout the novel, Kavanagh goes to great lengths to describe her in terms that emphasise not merely ordinariness in the woman with the single exception of her devotion to her mission, but to give her almost a negative aspect. She is self-effacing to an extraordinary degree, and the depths within her are communicated almost wholly through her actions. Madeleine is an orphan, the daughter of a hedge-schoolmaster, a reticent, uncommunicative girl living on the edges of a remote peasant community in one of the most inaccessible areas of the French interior, the mountainous Auvergne. It was significant to the aims of the work that Kavanagh chose to transfer the venue of the novel from the fairly busy little Breton port where Jugan worked to such a remoteness. It reinforces the constant sense of isolation that is associated throughout with the heroine; the fictional village of Mont-Saint-Jean is a society which is itself almost a reflection of Madeleine's status, isolated and remote from the currents of French political life at the time of the Revolution and the Empire. Even within that insular society, however, Kavanagh places Madeleine as yet more of an outsider, living alone at the fringes of the community in her secluded cottage by the cemetery, silent and all but friendless.

If its eponymous heroine is an unusual one, the novel was itself unusual in being, by the standards of the day, extremely brief, being a single-volume work. It is difficult, at this remove, to decide whether many of these idiosyncrasies stemmed from simple naiveté on Kavanagh's part. Although she had been seeking a living from writing since her return to England in 1844, her upbringing in France, outside the mainstream of English writing, may have given her little idea of current trends in readers' tastes. Certainly, the familiarity she displayed later in her two works of biographical sketches of French and English novelists suggests that her most familiar reading may have been the works popular in her father's youth, and carried to France by him. Whatever the reason, the new work did not fit readily into any popular category; it had no ready category of readership, either among the buyers of theology or of romantic novels. By extension, the work was either unlikely to find any publisher, or at risk of falling into the hands of an unscrupulous one like Newby, who had grossly mishandled the novels of both Anne and Emily Brontë, and Trollope. (Indeed, Newby was to figure in one of the more disturbing episodes in Kavanagh's career, as we will see). Somehow, however, Kavanagh attracted an influential ally. W.S. Williams, of Smith, Elder, the man who had first seen the merit of *Jane Eyre*, took an interest in Kavanagh's welfare, bringing her work in progress to the attention of Brontë, as well as communicating something of the young Irishwoman's straitened circumstances. In the end, it was not Smith, Elder who published *Madeleine*, but Richard Bentley, though Smith, Elder were to publish *Woman in France in the Eighteenth Century* two years later.

The nature of Kavanagh's heroine would suggest a debt to the innovatory plainness of Brontë's Jane, were it not for the fact that Kavanagh's book must have been well advanced before the other was published, and for the fact that *Madeleine's* appearance is integral to the tone of the work, and may, indeed, have been copied from her peasant original. She has no striking looks, "her features had no pretension to beauty; they did not even possess that rustic grace and prettiness which often characterises the peasant girl."^[6] She has, however, unlike Jane, no gift of articulating her feelings, and the third party narrative gives the reader no access to *Madeleine's* inner thoughts and motives. It is an apparently unpromising start, yet Kavanagh contrives to turn *Madeleine's*

essentially uncommunicative nature into a source of narrative strength. It is a technique that the modern reader is more habituated to, where observed actions can retain readers' interest, as they illuminate the motives of characters. In 1848, however, it was, perhaps, more unusual, but it is admirably suited to Kavanagh's near-didactic purpose.

The book carries on its title page a quotation from Matthew, Chapter 17, verse 20:

For verily I say unto you, if ye have faith as a grain of mustard-seed, ye shall say unto this mountain, Remove hence unto yonder place, and it shall remove; *and nothing shall be impossible unto you.*

The italics are Kavanagh's, and the text, for Madeleine uses no scripture in her quest. She has not, indeed, the arrogance to say that her ambitions will be realised. For her, if her dream is to be fulfilled, it will be because it is God's will, and not her own. Words, from others, she is impervious to, and she all but scorns their use herself. Deeds are at the heart of the book. It is tempting to wonder if Kavanagh was influenced in her portrayal by the still-fresh memory in Britain of Grace Horsley Darling, also a young woman who died early, and whose recorded words are few and stilted, and for whom the central decisive action of her life, as far as the public were concerned, was the rescue from the SS Forfarshire that was often capitalised as The Deed in public prints. If this model was in Kavanagh's mind, then perhaps the apparent riskiness of the theme of *Madeleine* was not quite as naive as it appears today. Madeleine is given two such acts of physical courage and endurance, the first at the beginning of the book, when she goes through the snow storm to aid the sick widow in Chapter III of the novel, and the second with the outbreak of fever when she goes to nurse an infected family. These add excitement to the narrative, but Kavanagh is careful not to allow them to predominate, or to draw attention from the real themes of the book.

The concentration on deeds highlights an unusual aspect of the book; the reader is given little or nothing about the wellsprings of Madeleine's mission to establish the hospital. In most novels, the motivation of the main character or characters is a substantial driving force of the narrative; here Madeleine herself is silent on the subject, and the author barely more forthcoming. This could be considered as a serious shortcoming in the novel, but there is a strong case for

regarding it as both a contribution to the realism of the work, and essential to Kavanagh's conception of her heroine. In the context of the remote village and region in which it takes place, the introduction of detailed rationalisation would seem out of place; Madeleine's irresistible ambition is, in this world, a force of nature as much as any other, like the snowstorm or the plague which feature in the story. Most of the villagers accept such things in their stride, and it is the rationalists like the mayor, who try to answer her simple convictions with logic, who appear weak and who are confounded. It is nowhere overt, but Kavanagh's Madeleine is portrayed as a force of nature, or, more accurately in this instance, an act of God.

The opening of the novel is a remarkable piece of description, setting the remote Auvergne village of Mont-Saint-Jean in its physical and historical context, and emphasising its extreme remoteness. Kavanagh is physically exact about location, and shows that her taste for the novels of eighteenth-century writers such as Mrs Radcliffe and Charlotte Smith had given her a feel for Romantic landscape. Indeed, the opening chapter, like some of Hardy's work at the end of the century, almost prefigures cinematic techniques, moving from the general landscape to focus on two figures. At first,

The rocky heights ... though barren towards their summits, become everywhere clothed with rich, deep verdure at their base, until the calm and lovely little lake, which sleeps in the lowest hollow, looks from the village on the hill like the last clear drop of water left in the bottom of an emerald cup.^[7]

The language and scenery is Romantic, and raises immediate expectations as to the nature of the story to be told. When, after glancing at the hard but satisfying life of the half-wild peasants of the valley, Kavanagh moves on to the figure of a man and a woman standing, in the gathering dusk, beside the picturesque little lake, those expectations seem about to be fulfilled. Only the comment that Madeleine is not beautiful sounds a warning, yet even here, she has "a noble, chiselled brow, and eyes of a deep azure blue". The stage appears set for a story of love.

Kavanagh is, however, using these expectations in a way which will, eventually, contribute to the story she really has to tell. The love that Madeleine has to give is not to be that of man and

woman; it is given to all her fellow villagers, and to her God. Kavanagh is, however, determined that we will not see her heroine as a creature untouched by normal human passions; the break from the young man, her fiancé Maurice, is shown to be painful, however strong her determination. The opening exchange seems set for romantic complications and jealousies, and it is as much a surprise to the reader as to the hapless Maurice when Madeleine gravely but firmly announces that their engagement is ended, and he is free. She has noted his love for another girl, which he has tried to ignore because of his obligation to Madeleine. Maurice's pride is hurt, and despite his love for the other girl, he sulks because he believes Madeleine has never cared for him. The scene is at once moving and comic in its portrayal of wounded male ego.

It is noteworthy that, in this opening chapter, Madeleine is shown in more lengthy conversation than anywhere else in the novel, where her quietness is consistently emphasised, even with her friend Marie. The effect is to heighten the sense of withdrawal from the normal expectations of life, and, ending as it does with a visit to Madeleine's father's grave, the sense of someone casting off, or being divorced from, most normal relationships is strongly marked. The cottage where she now lives alone is well outside the village, close to the graveyard, and Madeleine is already marked as someone apart in a physical sense, as she is to prove to be in a psychological one.

Chapter 2 introduces Madeleine's one close friend, the peasant girl Marie. She is a shrewd but unimaginative young woman through whose devoted eyes the reader occasionally sees Madeleine with the same baffled acceptance as the other villagers. Already, Madeleine's behaviour has changed. Though apparently untroubled by loneliness, and perfectly friendly to passers by, she speaks little, even to Marie. There is a small hint of what is to come later, when she begins to store up an unusual amount of food and winter clothing, but it is in Chapter 3 that Kavanagh's heroine first distinguishes herself from her fellow villagers in anything other than her reserve. Noticing that the chimney of a poor widow's cottage has ceased to smoke, Madeleine takes food and undertakes a long dangerous journey through a snow storm to the top of the hill where the cottage stands. Again, the style seems to reflect the Romantic gloom of Mrs Radcliffe, with its evocation of the scenery:

A wide sheet of dazzling snow extended before her, mingling in the distance with the faint, shadowy outline of the hills, which in their turn almost vanished in the dull gray of the sky .^[8]

The physical cold and danger are firmly handled, but it is, unknown to the reader, the first example of what is to be a recurring motif of the book - that of a journey, and particularly a journey through unknown difficulties, albeit to a clear end. Some of those later journeys are to be as much moral as physical, and the entire life of Madeleine Guerin becomes seen, by extension, as a metajourney to an equally desired end. Additionally, the attitude and role of Madeleine in the context of these little and that great journey is being established - that of a dogged and uncomplaining fighter against a hostile or uncaring world. The danger is made clear, and Kavanagh shows a very realistic touch with the physical pain, discomfort and fear. Although Madeleine “implore(s) the blessing of Heaven” as the weather worsens, and she can no longer see her way, Kavanagh does not descend to a miraculous deliverance; her heroine must rely on her own common sense, physical endurance and courage:

All Madeleine knew about the way she must take was, that she must face the snow, for she had noticed when it began to fall that the wind blew it towards her from the widow's cottage. Although this fact served to guide her, it also impeded her progress; her clothes were now thoroughly wet, and being thus rendered heavier, clung to her limbs.^[9]

Finally,

...her sinking limbs at length refused to bear her. The wind had changed, and she knew not where she was, yet she strove to go on, hoping still in the very face of death; the effort, however, was in vain, and, utterly exhausted, Madeleine sank down on her knees in the snow. She instinctively extended her hands to seek for support, and as she did so she felt a hard, flat substance resisting her touch.

It is, of course, the cottage; the greatest suspension of disbelief would not permit the reader to expect the eponymous heroine of a novel to perish at the end of the third chapter, but nevertheless, there is a strikingly realistic handling of physical sensation. Though Jane Eyre's flight after the exposure of Rochester's attempted bigamy is equally strongly delineated, it was probably not published when Kavanagh was writing this part of *Madeleine*, and the emphatic realism is unusual for the time.

Though the structure of the novel continuously reinforces the fact that journeys have a symbolic significance in this book, they are clearly also arduously realistic. The balance is important in the broader context of the novel, which is both the record of a spiritual progress and the tale of an immensely practical, down-to-earth peasant woman.

To recognise Julia Kavanagh's success in this way is far from saying that the novel does not have faults. Her language is a curious mix of well-chosen description and an occasional pedantry which perhaps betrays a youth brought up separated largely from her native tongue, save for her parents, one of whom, Morgan Peter Kavanagh, was the propagandist for a highly eccentric philological theory. The environment she had grown up in as an adolescent in Paris and Normandy, her love of books, and the literary ambitions of her father seem to have been influences both for the good and the bad in her style and subject matter. The combination of close and sympathetic observation of the minutiae of French peasant life with an occasionally almost scholarly turn of phrase perhaps disturbs a modern reader more than one of Kavanagh's contemporaries. In the dangerous journey to the widow's hut, most of the language is immediate, and designed to reflect the heroine's point of view:

A projecting rock which had attracted her notice a few minutes before, had now
disappeared; the valley and its lights, the widow's cottage, the very cottage, all were gone
...^[10]

The immediate effect is to force the reader to see the situation through Madeleine's eyes; the familiar objects are "gone", rather than obscured, emphasising the fact of her isolation as much as the physical danger. If Kavanagh had been capable of greater consistency in her approach, her little book would, perhaps, have enjoyed a more lasting reputation. But, only two pages earlier, the reader has been called away from identification with Madeleine by Kavanagh's clumsy, prim use of the phrase "the path already alluded to". The phrase is not simply inappropriate; it forces upon the reader the knowledge that they are reading a book. It is very much the flaw of a neophyte, but is an indication of some of the difficulties which were to beset Kavanagh's later work.

The opening chapters have been dealt with in some detail as a means of highlighting some of the aspects of Kavanagh's work which are particularly noteworthy, even at this early stage in her career. They do, however, serve better to illustrate her style than the flavour of the book as a whole. In essence, the remainder of the story is concerned with Madeleine's concern for the poor, the infirm and the elderly of the village, and tells the story of the single-minded dedication with which she develops, from a single act of charity, the idea of creating a hospital for these unfortunates, and sees it through, her simple faith sustaining her throughout. Kavanagh's approach to faith is central to the remainder of the book. Her Catholicism was unswerving throughout her life, and is fundamental to *Madeleine*. Nevertheless, if Kavanagh does not question her God, she is not necessarily unquestioning about her Church. The two parish priests involved in the novel are both good-hearted, pious men, but one of them is shown as a rather foolish and sometimes ineffectual one. None of them have the simplicity of faith that Madeleine sums up in her simple creed "God is good", that time and again routs doubters. The absolute minimalism of this tenet of Madeleine's faith is closely aligned with her reluctance to speak without need. Words, for her, seem to be superfluous to truth, at best irrelevant, and at worst obstructive. Naturally, she never says as much; practical deeds are Madeleine's touchstone of values. When the dying widow pours out her tale of woe in Chapter IV, she asks Madeleine what she would do in her case, starving with her children. The reply is brief; "I should work, or, if I could not, pray."^[11] It is the encounter with the widow which helps to clarify the vague ideas for which Madeleine has already been gathering food and clothing, as the scale and nature of the suffering of the poor in France is made clear to her. It would have been easy - and tempting, because of its instant appeal to the middle classes who were the likely audience for her books - for Kavanagh to have portrayed the dying woman as grateful to those who had in the past helped her. Instead, however, she begins as, for most of *Madeleine* she goes on, to show charitable works as an often thankless task. The dying woman, Jeanne, we soon find, is suffused with an implacable bitterness. She speaks of a rich woman who had come to aid her when, with her husband and all but one of her children dead, she was starving and ill:

"No, no, Madeleine, I did not feel grateful, and though she was kind, yet in my heart I hated and envied her ... What do you think that rich, kind lady said to me when I

comic portrait of a vain and ambitious minor politician, remains as evasive and manipulative as ever, save only in his support for her. People are not essentially changed; faiths are not essentially renewed, but the deeds that are needed take place, and the hospital is built and opened.

Only after many years, when the long task is done, does Kavanagh allow herself to firmly equate Madeleine's deeds, as opposed to her belief, with a Christian message; as Madeleine, after years of toil, enters the open hospital for the first time, her words echo those of the Nunc Dimitis.^[13] The last of Madeleine's journeys has yet to come; the strain of her task has affected her heart, and, without telling her patients the reason, she leaves the hospital in the care of Marie, and finally returns to the old cottage in which she was born. The last physical journey is followed, inevitably, by the last spiritual journey. It is a calm and fearless death that would appeal to the taste of a public that had been so affected by the death of Little Nell, seven years earlier, and retains a power to move even now. The funeral is conducted by the old parish priest, M. Bignon, whose sermon proceeds no further than his text, before he is too overcome to carry on. It is Kavanagh's final expression of her character's belief in the primacy of actions over words:

"This woman was full of good works and alms-deeds, which she did." (Acts, ix, 36).^[14]

Notes

- [1] Kavanagh, Julia, *Madeleine: A Tale of Auvergne Founded in Fact* (London, Bentley, 1848). All page references are to the first edition.
- [2] Kavanagh, Julia, *Nathalie: A Tale* (London, Colburn, 1850)
- [3] Colby, Vinetta, *Yesterday's Woman: Domestic Realism in the English Novel* (Princeton, 1974) p. 192.
- [4] Wolff, Robert Lee, *Nineteenth Century Fiction; A Biographical Catalogue based on the Collection formed by Robert Lee Wolff* (New York, Garland, 1981-86)
- [5] Kavanagh, Julia *Madeleine: A Tale of Auvergne, founded in fact* (London, Bentley, 1851) p. 13.

[6] Kavanagh, *ibid.*, p. 4.

[7] *ibid.*, p. 2

[8] *ibid.*, p. 37

[9] *ibid.*, p. 42

[10] *ibid.*, p. 41

[11] *ibid.*, p. 53

[12] *ibid.*, pp. 51-52

[13] *ibid.*, p. 291

[14] *ibid.* p. 346

Chapter 7: *Nathalie: A Tale.*

With Julia Kavanagh's second novel, the heroine was to be very different from Madeleine Guérin. As has been discussed earlier, there is much in the book that is reminiscent of *Jane Eyre*, but it is important, also, to be aware of the differences. Nathalie Montolieu is, like Jane, an orphan. Since the novel is set in Catholic France, she is the daughter of a doctor rather than a cleric, but she, like Jane, earns her living as a schoolteacher. She is, however, unlike Jane Eyre, beautiful, and, more importantly, instead of the strong sense of self worth that marks Brontë's heroine, she has only a fiery Provencal pride. She is wilful, but in the manner of the unformed adolescent. Her nature is fundamentally good, but she is impatient of restraint. If *Madeleine* can be considered as the story of how its heroine affected her world, *Nathalie* is the much more traditional theme of how the world affects the heroine. Once more, the theme serves as a reminder of the nature of Kavanagh's formative reading. Despite its strong structural debt to Brontë, it clearly demonstrates a lineage that draws on much earlier models. In the theme of a young woman making her way in the world, there are echoes of works of the previous century; Fanny Burney's *Evelina* and Charlotte Smith's *Emmeline* are both forebears. As will be discussed later, the tone of the work also suggests another model.

These factors apart, however, *Nathalie* is, indeed, very much in the mould of *Jane Eyre* insofar as it concerns an orphan girl, indeed, a schoolteacher, who comes under the protection of a rich older man who falls in love with her. Following a misunderstanding, they separate, and are finally reunited. The frail vessel that was Kavanagh's own special vision seems overwhelmed by the book that produced such controversy in the year when Kavanagh had completed *Madeleine*, and

while it awaited publication. By the time Kavanagh had re-interpreted the themes of Charlotte Brontë's book, the older author had, of course moved on to other things in *Shirley*, "something real, cool and solid, ... something unromantic as Monday morning"^[1] In some ways, however, Kavanagh was already, in *Nathalie*, moving the *Jane Eyre* structure into a less Romantic (if still romantic!) idiom. It was, in truth, only the narrative structure of *Jane Eyre* that Kavanagh used; the tone she employed was her own contribution, with the darker passions of Brontë's original replaced by tones at once warmer and less deep. This change in approach of necessity involved a very different approach to the central character. Even as a child, Brontë's Jane has the integrity that marks the grown woman; even as a woman, about to be married, there is much of the child in Nathalie Montolieu. Oliphant rightly notes that the story is "very sunny and very French".^[2]

There is undoubtedly a loss of the individuality that marked *Madeleine* in *Nathalie*, and, curiously, the attempt to follow the model of such a powerfully serious work as *Jane Eyre* results in a work far less serious than Kavanagh's first. Nevertheless, it is clear that, if some of the special attributes of the earlier work were subdued, others, the lightness of touch, and the ability to draw character with a sharp eye for foibles, were given freer expression.

In particular, there remained the element first seen in *Madeleine* which was to earn Kavanagh her secure niche among contemporary readers, her grasp of French society and French character. In the earlier work, the Frenchness was incidental. Kavanagh could, perhaps, have transferred her interpretation of Jugan's achievement to, perhaps, Ireland (the Catholicism of the work would have made it impossible to convey in an English setting), but the most effective way to convey many of the nuances was to retain its French locale. With the new work, however, Kavanagh must have made a positive decision to locate her tale in France. Those reasons may have been entirely practical; she probably had a wider experience of French provincial society than of English, since she had probably been living since her return to England in the very poor circumstances in which Charlotte Brontë found her in the year *Nathalie* was published. On that basis, she could most convincingly set the book, with its fundamental change in social class, in a society where she had

some experience at both levels. Whatever the reasons, the novel, with its predecessor, set Kavanagh firmly within the mould of a writer of French tales.

The minute characterisation of French types met with wide acceptance. Charlotte Brontë was particularly taken by the character of M. de Sainville's aunt Radegonde, the elderly Canoness who befriends Madeleine, and whose benevolent misreadings of almost every situation gives her great vividness. Added to this, *Nathalie*, however reminiscent of *Jane Eyre* it might be, contained nothing which might offend the susceptibilities of the Victorian middle class. Given Kavanagh's ability to create a French milieu which was attractive yet mildly exotic and with which she became identified, her moral acceptability, and her skill, she henceforth found a faithful audience, and, for a time, a fashionable one. Certainly, from this time, Kavanagh's position moved on to become, for a while, the sort of novelist whose latest works would be seriously discussed at dinner parties, as Percy Fitzgerald^[3] was to describe her.

Undoubtedly, at this time, Kavanagh was not only popular, but also extremely busy. While Henry Colburn was publishing her second novel, the interest in her which had been taken by W.S. Williams at Smith, Elder was bearing fruit; in the same year, they were undertaking the publication of the first of her series of non-fiction works, *Woman in France in the Eighteenth Century*. It seems a reasonable supposition that Kavanagh's immersion in developments in French society helped her to achieve the sense of a full social background which permeates *Nathalie*, though historical background is generally quite absent from the work. Like *Madeleine*, the new work had a quotation on its title page, but this time, the choice of Wordsworth gives a clear indication of the very different path Kavanagh means to pursue:

A creature not too pure or good
For human nature's daily food;
For transient sorrows, simple wiles,
Praise, blame, love, kisses, tears and smiles.^[4]

Kavanagh's language remains essentially similar to that she employed in her first novel, but her approach to this very different story shows that she had given careful thought to the different

demands of this type of work. Madeleine Guérin had been a woman of firm purpose, and she influenced others rather than the reverse; because of this, many of the subsidiary characters in the novel are sketched only in those respects in which they relate to the heroine. This does not give them any less apparent substance for the reader, but, with the possible exception of the Mayor, it would be difficult to conceive of them having an existence outside the environment Kavanagh prepared for them. Nathalie Montolieu, on the other hand, is an unformed persona; the novel is as much *bildungsroman* as romance, and the heroine learns from those she encounters. In consequence, Kavanagh has to realise not only her main character, but also the significant secondary ones much more fully in her second novel. It is only in retrospect that one realises that *Madeleine* had, as its central character, a heroine who was, as far as the moral universe of the book was concerned, virtually perfect, and the realisation that Kavanagh had succeeded in making her both likeable and believable. Nathalie Montolieu has no such virtues beyond a basic preference for good and a natural amiability, and Kavanagh goes so far, in her Preface, as to warn the reader that her characters should not be mistaken as “embodiments of the author’s conception of moral beauty”.

It has to be admitted that, in *Nathalie*, Kavanagh succeeded in maintaining her gallery of characters under control in a way which often seemed to elude her later in her career. Though the strain of the three-volume format is discernible in the book, it does not, here, descend to the introduction of characters and incidents which prove to be mere padding, adding nothing to the themes or the story. Instead, characters are often described with a degree of subtlety. This is hardly surprising, since, as Shirley Foster and Richard Colby have both noted, the book may well have been a partial impetus for Charlotte Brontë’s *Villette*.^[5] One character must, however, be distinguished from the others; Nathalie’s sister, Rose Montolieu, remains a focus for those themes which were personally important to Kavanagh, and which informed *Madeleine*, but which fall slightly outside the chosen focus of *Nathalie*. The centrality of those concerns to the author may be judged by the suggestion that Rose is in part a self-portrait of the author, though probably only to the extent that Mr. Casaubon, in *Middlemarch*, was an admitted self-portrait by George Eliot of certain aspects of her own character.

Nathalie, A Tale opens in a Normandy school-house, with the vinegary schoolmistress, Mademoiselle Dantin, calling for her young teacher, Nathalie. The opening pages give an early indication of the fluent way in which Kavanagh was to manipulate symbols in the novel. In fact, she was dealing with broad regional stereotypes which would scarcely have needed mentioning to a French reader, but which she introduces discreetly and skilfully to an Anglophone readership. Nathalie comes from Provence; she is dark-haired and dark-eyed, while her employer is stiff, northern, pale and Norman. Much is to be made of the temperamental volatility of the young Provençale throughout the book, and her exotic aspect in the dour Norman provinces, and, even before her appearance, the ambience of bourgeois life in the cramped towns of Normandy has been made manifest. Kavanagh stresses the colourlessness and coolness of the schoolhouse from the outset. The first few paragraphs set up a complex set of resonances; since the opening words are “Bring in the light, and tell Mademoiselle Nathalie that it is my desire to speak to her instantly”, there is an immediate, almost subliminal, association, even before the entrance of the heroine, with the coming of light and warmth, the expectation of something more vivid. That effect is enhanced by the description of the scene in language which hints at both coldness and something approaching emotional death. The evening is chill, the trees outside are only “dimly visible”, and the reader is faced with a room “without light or fire, in the gathering gloom of evening, with pale maps and shadowy globes”^[6] Within this deliberately sepulchral ambience, Mme. Dantin has already been described as stiff, and with her arms folded on her breast, the traditional attitude of a corpse. It is her humanity, of course, which is moribund; Dantin epitomises much of the dourness of Normande provincial petit bourgeoisie, but it is made clear that she is not unique; Kavanagh describes the small towns of the region as “dark, lonely and rather misanthropic-looking ... cold and cheerless” (p. 3).

When Nathalie enters, Kavanagh’s highly visual imagination is again to the fore; “the light ... fell full on [Nathalie’s] whole person, leaving all dark behind it” (ibid. p. 12). Against the gloom of the room and the rigid angularity that have characterised the schoolmistress, her young teacher is described in diametrically opposite terms, with “soft and deep” dark eyes, and a curved chin. In particular, images of heat and light recur:

Yet hers was not the still beauty of cold art; it had the light from within which is to a countenance as is the lambent flame to the alabaster lamp in which it burns.^[7]

“Ray”, “light”, “flame”, “mobile”, “warmth” are all key descriptions, but Kavanagh soon interposes small warning notes, “temper”, “capricious” and “impulsive”. Soon, Dantin’s apparently merely pedantic complaints about Nathalie’s breach of rules in entering the garden take on a series of veiled hints about immodesty and impropriety, then she abruptly asks how long Nathalie has been acquainted with their neighbour. This transpires not to be the aristocratic M. de Sainville, the owner of the chateau which abuts Mme Dantin’s property, whom Nathalie has seen only at a distance, but his nephew, Charles Marceau. Dantin has intercepted a letter from the young man, and accuses Nathalie of deliberately attempting a tryst in the garden. The young man has been following Nathalie, and pressing his unwelcome attentions on her; the letter has been sent to her by a bribed servant. Dantin demands that Nathalie now exercise “purity and reserve” and she, furious, rounds on her employer with scorn, who retaliates by giving her a month’s notice.^[8]

Although Kavanagh has characterised the mean-minded nature of bourgeois Sainville,^[9] Chapter I already notes the existence of a flourishing aristocratic society in the area. Nevertheless, Nathalie’s southern temperament has, by the end of that chapter, been sufficiently established to set it off against the rather different type of reserve she is about to come into contact with in this rank of society. Within Chapter II, Nathalie is again confronted by Charles Marceau, who enters the school garden to speak to her; discovered by Dantin, she is told to leave immediately. Although Dantin shortly begins to give signs of relenting her harshness, Nathalie is furious enough to give evidence of her hot temper:

“In my country, ... we are either at peace or at enmity. Now I tell you that I am not at peace with you, and that I will not sleep beneath your roof.”^[10]

The decision brings home to Nathalie a host of problems, but her preparations for a nervous departure are interrupted by the arrival of Charles Marceau’s mother, the widowed sister of the rich M. de Sainville. She has learned of the effect of her son’s conduct, and comes to offer Nathalie the hospitality of the chateau. The offer is made out of a sense of noblesse oblige rather than genuine

feeling, but is nevertheless hospitable. With Nathalie's acceptance, the main thrust of the story begins.

In the characters of Mme Dantin and the Chevalier de Méranville-Louville, the grandly named but poor dancing master of the school, Kavanagh is able to draw quite full portraits of fairly rounded but limited characters, whose reactions the reader would feel capable of predicting with reasonable accuracy when they recur. With Nathalie's translation to the chateau, a new set of characters are introduced with whose motives and attitudes the heroine's fate will be closely linked for the remainder of the book. Aunt Radegonde, a Canoness (of a secular order, whose only additional demand on its members appears to be celibacy, since she lives in extreme comfort with her nephew), is also comparatively predictable, but only because she is, essentially, a sweet-natured, simple old lady. Nevertheless, she produces a complex reaction in Nathalie that emphasises how close she still is to childhood:

She was evidently very old, but her neat and slender little figure had not suffered from years or lost the nicety of its proportions; she sat and knitted in a very erect fashion.

Nathalie thought she had never beheld a being who realized so completely her childish beau ideal of the benevolent fairy.^[11]

The old lady's welcome to Nathalie is free from the patronizing tone of her niece's concern, and her frank admiration of the young woman's beauty sets the first alarm bells ringing in Mme. Marceau's mind. If the novel is largely concerned with the growing relationship between the older, graver M. de Sainville and Nathalie, it is Mme Marceau's attempts to hinder that relationship which give the story impetus. As such, the characters of both brother and sister are given close attention. The only character not of this central circle who is given special attention is Nathalie's sister, Rose Montolieu, who does not make an appearance in the novel until Chapter VIII, though an earlier exchange between Aunt Radegonde and Nathalie reveals her existence, in a manner which suggests Kavanagh was very consciously preparing her reader to be alert to the gap between their social and their moral response. The exchange is given an extra piquancy because the "social" view is placed in

the mouth of the formally vowed Canoness, whose order we have already been told is a “gay and worldly” one.

“Your sister is a little severe,” said the Canoness, giving Nathalie a puzzled look, “but although she of course means well, all this is not quite correct, is it?”

“Indeed it is,” frankly replied Nathalie; “but then Rose has a right to be severe; she is nearly perfect herself.”

“It is quite proper you should think so,” decisively said the Canoness; “but for my part, I do not doat on perfect people.”^[12]

Rose is introduced immediately following a passage of writing which the *Athenaeum* chose to form the centre of its enthusiastic review of *Nathalie*. It is undoubtedly an excellent, sustained piece of description, taking the reader through the old Norman town, and telling a little of its history and loss of importance, but it is clear that the reviewer failed to notice, or perhaps identify, the potent symbolism which Kavanagh deploys; the heroine’s route has taken her by a disused side entrance of the ancient abbey of the town:

...in a sheltering angle of the building, stood a small stone cross and well; the gift to the town of some pious burgher, of that age of faith when an idea of sanctity seems to have been linked with clear and flowing waters. The well-worn steps attested it had once been greatly frequented, but none, save the inhabitants of the court, came to it now; another fountain, twice as large, profusely gilt and bronzed, with a gay nymph instead of the lowly and faithful cross, stood in the neighbouring thoroughfare. Little heeding the changes of human caprice or creed, clear and sparkling as ever, the pure water flowed on and fell into its little stone basin with a low cheerful murmur, like a bountiful soul that gives freely still, in spite of all the neglect and ingratitude of man.^[13]

It is slightly perplexing for the modern reader to note the complete failure of the *Athenaeum*’s reviewer to note that the old well thus reflects the simple, devout attitudes of Rose, equally giving to those around her, also taking the cross for her symbol, and standing for an older expression of faith. Shirley Foster has commented on Kavanagh’s attitude to characters like Rose Montolieu, and, later, to the heroine of *Rachel Grey*.^[14] Though she detects “hints of questioning or

dissent", Foster sees these characters as presenting a vision of spinsterhood as "a state of mournful resignation", and that life without emotional fulfilment "can at best be only calm stoical endurance". To accept this view as representing the whole of what the author was intending with her portrayal of Rose is to undervalue the degree to which Kavanagh was working as a conscious artist. To view Kavanagh's treatment of the character of Rose Montolieu as little more than an archetype for spinsterhood is difficult to reconcile with the general sense of fulfilment which Kavanagh had previously given to the spinster life of Madeleine Guérin in her first novel. There is truth in Foster's premise, but the treatment of Rose remains rather more complex, and perhaps ambiguous, than Foster is able to deal with both in such a short space and within the aims of her study.

Within Rose there is a streak of martyrdom; as she confesses to her sister in Vol.II, Chapter VII, "Did you think then, ... that because I was plain and unlovely that I could not dream of what love might be? Did you think then that because I seemed reasonable and calm, I had not a woman's heart?" (p.180). Despite this, however, she tells her sister "there is a joy in the brave endurance of sorrow; there is happiness in adoration, not in the cold lip-worship, but in the fervent adoration of the silent heart." Though her attitudes undoubtedly have elements of masochism, for Rose, at least, there *is* an emotional fulfilment that depends on "calm, stoical endurance".

Additionally, it is possible to conjecture, even at this stage of Kavanagh's career, that she was beginning to be conscious of her work, both completed and projected, as an integrated whole. The four non-fiction works on the position and influence of women in history, *Woman in France in the Eighteenth Century*, *French Women of Letters*, *English Women of Letters* and *Women of Christianity* suggest the existence of broad aims and concepts in the young writer's mind, and the various "Manneville" stories eventually collected in the posthumous *Forget-Me-Nots*, written as they were over a period of years, suggest in their eventual cohesion that a writer ready to discuss the complete oeuvres of her predecessors was capable of considering the cumulative effect of her work. If so, it appears not impossible that Rose Montolieu is intended in part to provide the opposite side of the coin to Madeleine Guérin. The life of sacrifice to others and the early death, even aspects of their appearance, make it possible that Kavanagh was, indeed, exploring the darker elements of the

self-sacrificial nature, placing it in an ultimately unsatisfying context, and denying this alternative Madeleine the love and worldly respect which fell to the original. In some respects, the character of Rose, in counterpoint to that of her sister, combines the contradictory functions served in *Jane Eyre* by Helen Burns and by St. John Rivers, the first emphasising the gentle virtues of submission, and the latter the chillier aspects of zealotry.

It is also useful to consider Foster's premise in the light of the fact that Nathalie has *two* reliable comforters; one, in her ascetic way, is Rose, but the other is also celibate; the Canoness, Aunt Radegonde's life is anything but one of stoical endurance; her childlike happiness does not need the trappings of marriage to be one of contentment. There was no narrative necessity for Kavanagh to make the old woman a member of a religious order, and it is not unreasonable to surmise that she intended to provide a counterpoise to Rose's particular attitudes. Indeed, the sombreness of Rose's life is much more a reflection of her subjection to the whims of her tyrannous blind aunt than directly from her spinsterhood.^[15]

The main narrative thread of *Nathalie* is, inevitably, one of the developing relationship between Armand de Sainville, the grave Norman aristocrat in his thirties, and the eighteen-year-old orphan Provencale, with her excitable southern ways. Although the relationships between *Nathalie* and *Jane Eyre* are striking, with Mme Marceau's plotting on behalf of her son providing a faint analogy to the Blanche Ingrams' plot in Brontë's book, the differences are almost as illuminating as the resemblances. Everything is on a smaller, more domestic scale; Mrs Rochester has no equivalent, and the wild flight across the moors becomes nothing more than leaving the chateau, first for Nathalie's blind aunt's house, and then back to Mlle. Dantin's. Of necessity, these changes in scale transform the central characters from the powerful archetypes of Brontë's imagination to something far less elemental. The change is not entirely a loss however, since it allows for a more humorous approach in places, and turns the story into one of mutual hesitations and slow adaptations. In particular, it allows for an exploration of the reluctance and uncertainty of both Nathalie and de Sainville to be undertaken. Whereas Rochester has no doubts about his feelings for Jane Eyre, de

Sainville is concerned about the compatibility of temperament which might arise between himself and his young guest. He has himself been badly hurt in an earlier relationship.

Kavanagh, in fact, produces something not unlike a reading of *Jane Eyre* as it might have appeared from the pen of Jane Austen. It is only necessary to look briefly at the minor characters to see that what is being produced is as much a comedy of social manners as a love story. There is a galaxy of characters whose eccentricities provide much of the sparkle of the work. Mme Dantin and Rose's tyrannous aunt are undoubtedly unlikeable people, but the scene where they are put together, in fierce but discreet competition is very funny.^[16] To that, one can add the ambitious femme de chambre, with her vanity over her skill with the coiffure, the ridiculous, though well-meant gallantry of the old Chevalier, and the temperamental cook attending on Rose's aunt. The comedy is broader with such characters, but it is by no means absent in the delineation of the more central figures; the Canoness, Aunt Radegonde, with her habit of calling Nathalie, who stands several inches taller, "Petite", her indignant denial of her after-dinner dozes, and her profound and mistaken belief in her own subtlety of understanding of human nature is a fine invention.

It is not without interest to observe that Kavanagh, some thirteen years later, would give more extensive coverage to Jane Austen than to any other English woman novelist in her *English Women of Letters*. Just as in Austen's works, then, the comedy does not stop with the minor characters; Nathalie, M. de Sainville and his sister are equally open to the author's discreet satire. Indeed, some of Austen's incidents and symbols are discreetly and subtly employed; the poor orphan slightly adrift in a large aristocratic house, in which she must be resolute to maintain her personal integrity is not unrelated to the central situation in *Mansfield Park*, and the overtones of sexuality implicit in the illicit entry into private areas which hints at the future fall of Maria Bertram in that novel^[17] has an echo, albeit less subtle, in Madeleine's two confrontations with Charles Marceau, first in Mme Dantin's garden^[18], and then in M. de Sainville's summerhouse.^[19] To say that Kavanagh's handling of this is less subtle than Austen's is not to denigrate her handling of this point, since it does not prefigure an equivalent fall. Indeed, Kavanagh adds her own subtleties; it is noteworthy that the first of these incidents involves a disregard of Nathalie's privacy, and all that is

associated with that; the second, however, is equally a disregard of the rights of Nathalie and those of de Sainville, and in this way highlights the developing relationship and commonality of interests of Nathalie and her host.

The resemblance to Austen is also marked in the handling of social gatherings; the fete which de Sainville organises, ostensibly to aid the charitable efforts of his sister and her friend but in reality designed to provide a diversion for his young guest, is handled with aplomb, delicately exploring the differing motives and responses of the participants. Mme Marceau (or, as she, to her brother's annoyance prefers to be known, Mme Marceau de Sainville) sees the event as an opportunity for her brother to seek a political standing, the Canoness as an opportunity for eating sweetmeats, and Nathalie as an occasion for dancing. Nathalie has an opportunity to show the caring side of her character; unwilling to spoil the pleasure of her "Marraine", she accompanies the Canoness, and is rescued to be allowed to dance by de Sainville.

The whole episode of the fete gives Kavanagh considerable scope to develop the character of Mme Marceau, who seems to have been, until this point, vain, self-centred and rather shallow, but now appears in a more manipulative guise, as she attempts to remove Nathalie (who is an impediment, in her view, to her plans for her son) by finding her a position as companion to the nieces of her friend Mme de Jussac. It is beyond Mme Marceau's small but devious mind to recognise that Nathalie is genuinely so repelled by her son that there is no chance of his success; she has, at this point, no more awareness than has Nathalie of Armand de Sainville's growing affection for the young girl. Kavanagh manages a scene of icily polite conflict of wills as de Sainville calmly unpicks his sister's plans, and enables Nathalie to remain.^[20] The end of the episode (Vol. II, p. 72) offers a clear glimpse into Nathalie's sense of values, after Mme Marceau has insultingly stalked off, refusing to speak to Nathalie further:

Nathalie remained alone. She felt this slight more keenly perhaps than anything else; she could forgive the scheme for sending her away - the proud lady did not know how little she cared for her son - but to punish and slight her because that scheme happened to be defeated, was cruel and ungenerous.

Generosity of spirit is, indeed, one of the key themes of the book, both in its values and its limitations. Nathalie has it throughout, but it is often blunted by her youthful naiveté. Charles Marceau is young, eligible, and has a genuine passion for Nathalie, but he has not the generosity of spirit to recognise her discomfort in his arrogant approaches. The Canoness has a natural generosity towards others, but it is limited by her own little vanities and inability to give their voices as much credence as her own. Mme Marceau has, at first, the appearance of a generous nature, as she rescues the young Nathalie; though we learn soon that it has been done at her brother's wish, there is still a genuine attempt to make the young girl at home, until it becomes clear that to be gracious is part of Mme Marceau's obsessive concern for her own status. The two most interesting figures in this context are Rose Montolieu and Armand de Sainville. The generosity of Rose's spirit is manifest, yet it is warped by her strange, enclosed life. There can be few greater acts of generosity than to give up one's life for others, yet Rose speaks of it as something demanded of her. The development of de Sainville through the book is the slow revelation of the generosity of his nature that he hides. He will not admit that the fete has been arranged for Nathalie's benefit, and continues to tease her.

The ripening relationship is handled deftly by Kavanagh; neither Nathalie nor de Sainville will recognise their attraction for what it is; indeed, Nathalie persuades herself that what she feels when de Sainville leaves her and Aunt Radegonde alone in the chateau for the winter is ennui; indeed she says as much to him on his unexpected return. She is bewildered when she finds he has gone out of his way to collect flowers from the garden of her old home in Arles for her, a circumstance which rouses suspicion in the Canoness:

"He calls you 'his ward,' or 'a child,' or even 'poor little thing.' You speak of him as an old man. Now, my dear, if both you and he labour under this great mistake, I, a woman of penetration, do not, and I feel it my duty to enlighten you; I assure you, therefore, that Armand could by no means be your father; just as I have been assuring him that you are neither a child or a little girl."^[21]

The "woman of penetration", for once in her life correct, typically fails to draw the appropriate conclusion. In one of Kavanagh's pieces of Austen-like humour, the Canoness is shortly

congratulating herself that Nathalie will learn in time “the beauties of celibacy”, at the same time as Nathalie is admiring herself in her mirror with new eyes.

Later, Mme Marceau, returned from Paris, is ill for a long time, and comes to rely on Nathalie, whom she ceases to treat with condescension. Finally becoming aware of her brother’s feelings, she hints to Nathalie of Armand’s former love. Shortly after, Nathalie, reading de Sainville’s copy of the *Maxims of La Rochefoucauld*, notes three underlined:

“A man may love like a madman, not like a fool.”

“There are few women whose merit outlives their beauty.”

“True love is like spirits: spoken of by all; seen by few.” (Vol. II, p. 149)

Mme Marceau finally reveals to Nathalie that Armand had taken a vow never to marry, a fact which Aunt Radegonde confirms, finally revealing the source of her own ambiguous feelings towards her nephew; the girl he had intended to marry as a young man was her niece. The young woman had loved Armand, but he, in deference to her father’s wishes, had allowed her to be married to another man, after which she had died of a broken heart. Nathalie is, however, unaware of the motive underlying Mme Marceau’s revelation; she has realised the extent of her brother’s feelings, and views with alarm the possibility of Nathalie’s marriage to her brother. Such a marriage would mean that her son Charles would no longer be heir to de Sainville’s fortune. When Charles arrives at Sainville, Nathalie determines to leave, but learns accidentally that Armand now gives his youthful vow no importance. While delighted by this, she learns also of his intention to sever all connection with his nephew for his second infringement of the prohibition against visiting the chateau. De Sainville tests Nathalie by remitting that action if she will request it, and, fearful for Mme Marceau’s health, she does so.

De Sainville has extracted a mysterious promise from Nathalie that she will have faith in him, though he will not say why. When she learns that he has given Charles free permission to propose, and that he will freely consent to their wedding, she refuses, and Mme Marceau realises the true state of her feelings. Nathalie is moved by her understanding of what has taken place to comment disparagingly “God save me from the false thing called men’s honour!” (Vol. II, p. 232),

and when Armand learns this, after her promise, the seed is sown for their separation. Believing Armand to be incapable of love, she goes to stay with Rose in her aunt's house. In an extended chapter, Kavanagh has Nathalie repeat the story of her growing love to Rose, inadvertently showing the crooked path of her own motivations during the proposal of Charles Marceau and after.

Nathalie is recalled to the chateau ten days later by the news that Mme Marceau is very ill; knowing that Charles and Armand are both away she returns. She tells Mme Marceau that she will not marry Charles and that it is her intention to leave Normandy, as soon as her means permit. The sick woman tries to bribe Nathalie to leave immediately, and shows clearly that she is aware of Nathalie's love for Armand. With Mme Marceau's death, Nathalie is forced to remain at the chateau for a further fortnight to look after the Canoness during the absence of de Sainville and his nephew. When she returns to Rose, it is to tell her of the incidents on the return of de Sainville and his nephew. Armand seeks to know Nathalie's answer to Charles' proposal, and the latter, having learned from his mother of Nathalie's true affections, seeks to manipulate her. Tormented, she has finally refused Charles, who is about to announce her secret when he is stopped by de Sainville's announcement that "I intend asking her to become my wife". Nathalie is struck by his coldness of manner, and when he later finds her in an arbour by a marble statue of a sleeping nymph that Kavanagh has constantly associated in Nathalie's mind with Armand's earlier love, she at first resists him, until his reserve is swept aside.

Though Nathalie's love for de Sainville is now open, Kavanagh does not allow her character to settle down into vacuous content; she remains as spirited as ever, and is given both a growing awareness of the world and the shifting emotions of a young and headstrong woman. A key exchange occurs when Armand is explaining to Nathalie the story of Lucile, his former betrothed, who had agreed to marry another man to please her father:

"Besides, what man of delicacy cares to wed her who has been the betrothed of another?"

"A delicacy women must not feel of course," thought Nathalie, with some bitterness. But she said nothing, and Monsieur de Sainville was too confident of the privileges of his sex to dream that such a thought might offer itself to the young girl.^[22]

This is the first indication of the need that develops in Nathalie to try the depth of her new betrothed's passion. She becomes irritated that he seems smugly secure in her love. When Armand dismisses a servant, however, her pleas for his forgiveness are refused, and she calls him a tyrant; only later does she learn that the servant has been disrespectful to her. Though she tries to apologise, de Sainville remains hurt by her mistrust. She continues to test him, refusing to name a date for their wedding, and admits to Rose that she fears to commit herself - he is too realistic to commit himself absolutely to their love lasting for ever, while she knows his honesty would not permit him to dissemble if it died. Though Rose dissuades her, de Sainville has been too hurt to approach the question again, and the misunderstandings mount. When de Sainville insists that a wife should "submit, not blindly, but willingly, to the guidance of him to whom she has confided her destiny", Nathalie's rebelliousness arises again.

All this might be very reasonable, but logic always chilled Nathalie. Unfortunately, those who loved her best never seemed aware that she thought with her heart. Monsieur de Sainville's cold language fell on her warm southern feelings like the icy breeze of some northern shore.^[23]

Kavanagh proves herself adept at the close analysis of the interplay between these two disparate characters, the Provençal and the Normande, the young and the elder, the emotional and the logical. Charlotte Brontë, on recording her reactions to the book in a letter to Kavanagh is, indeed, tempted to be critical - "Nathalie's perverseness as well as her final submission struck me as a little exaggerated - so did some of the other traits in M. de Sainville character", but as she admits, "the contrast in their natures, and the kind of contrast is a happy thought; the mutual attraction to which it leads would - I doubt not, be exactly paralleled in nature and real life."^[24]

There is, indeed, a little truth in Brontë's doubts, but this, perhaps, had more to do with the conventions of the three-volume novel than with inadequacies on Kavanagh's part; half a volume was yet to fill, and all the expected problems save the long-foreshadowed death of Rose had now been resolved. The only substantial material which Kavanagh still had to work with, since in this novel she eschewed the pointless diversions that sometimes marred her work over the next few years,

was indeed, the sharply contrasted characters of her two protagonists. When Nathalie refuses to promise obedience to de Sainville, they quarrel and part. He sends a letter saying that he will now go away for a long time, and implores her not to neglect his aunt, the canoness. After a while, she goes to the old lady, and learns that de Sainville maintains his affection for her, while relinquishing any claim on her love, an idea which naturally irritates Nathalie still more. Her attention is diverted when she realises how ill Rose is. As she slips away over the summer and autumn, Rose seeks to persuade her sister to her view of the transience of human relationships, causing Nathalie much anguish, but without persuading her. Kavanagh gives Rose's last hours a grim fitness for her ascetic self-denying nature. She has, at the end, begun to love the sights of nature, but on the last night:

Nathalie had said to her: "Do look at that beautiful sunset."

"No," replied her sister, in a low tone, "it is better not," and she steadily kept her look averted until the last golden gleam had faded away from the walls of the little room. Then she turned and looked at the grey sky, and smiled - perchance at this last victory.^[25]

With Rose gone, a grieving Nathalie returns to the employ of Mme Dantin^[26] who allows her to make occasional brief visits to Aunt Radegonde. She is suddenly faced with the task of selling the house and garden to M. de Sainville on behalf of Mme Dantin, following which he writes that he still loves her. Aunt Radegonde schemes to bring them together, but fails; Armand repeats his offer of marriage, but Nathalie is too proud, and feels herself wronged. No-one knows of the relationship between de Sainville and Nathalie, so that the rumours of his increased moroseness are constantly before her at the schoolhouse. It is only a dream in which Rose's spirit urges her to "Try!" that forces her into a last meeting where she asks him to adopt her as daughter. Finally, when he shows her the folly of such a move, she finally consents to be his wife, and she vows without asking "to love, honour and obey you" and he promises eternal affection.^[27] Only then do both realise that they have given what they would not give to the other when asked. Kavanagh ends the novel with a more realistic note than was to be expected of such a work; as she remarks "a tale has, properly speaking, no right to extend beyond that fiat of a heroine's destiny, called marriage".^[28] In the final pages, however, she offers a glimpse of the possible futures for the de Sainvilles. He, returning in the

evening, is struck with a doubt that she may some day “repent her present choice, and wish she had chosen herself some younger mate”; in his maturity,

he has not lived in vain; he knows the fallacy of hope, the weakness of humanity; the perishable nature of its deepest feelings; the freshness of Nathalie’s hopes, the fervour of her faith cannot exist for him..^[29]

It is a remarkably sombre note to strike at this point, far more so than Brontë manages at the end of *Jane Eyre*, and, because of the depth of feeling underlying it, quite distinct from the cooler realism of Austen, whose influence is also noticeable in the book. In its ambiguity, such an ending serves to underline the complexity of tone in the novel. If *Nathalie* lacks the strong passions of the novel which so clearly inspired it, (and, perhaps, subverts such extreme emotion with its constant reiteration of Nathalie’s quick, but immature feelings), Kavanagh displays a fine gift for the delineation of delicate shifts of feeling and response in conversations, which would require much closer analysis to capture. If the most immediate impression of the novel is one of the remarkable impact of *Jane Eyre* on another writer of lesser but by no means contemptible gifts, closer analysis illuminates the way in which that model was adapted to quite distinct ends. One of the areas in which the views of Kavanagh and Charlotte Brontë were most opposed was in their respective attitudes to the possibility of a separate “feminine” tradition in the novel. For “Curren Bell”, that ambiguously masculine persona, the idea was, and remained a nonsense. Kavanagh, on the other hand, was to spend much of her career in the task of demonstrating and justifying that tradition, and it is clear that, in both of her first two novels, she drew on skills and attitudes that are traceable to writers she was to discuss at length in her two “Women of Letters” works.

In her *Brontë Transformations*, Patsy Stoneman has discussed some aspects of *Nathalie* as one of the earliest examples of the way in which *Jane Eyre* was used by Brontë’s successors. Viewing her comments in the context of Kavanagh’s modifying belief in a distinct feminine women’s tradition, both in the novel and society, offers some fruitful approaches to the differences between the original and Kavanagh’s work. A particular element to which she draws attention is the sense of ennui in the confined lives of the female inhabitants of the chateau, the sense of “restless

imprisonment".^[30] Quoting Nathalie's comment that "Among the 'wrongs of women', few are really more heavy and insupportable than the forced inactivity to which they are condemned in all the life, fire and energy of youth", Stoneman relates this stultification to similar comments by other writers following Brontë. In the context of Kavanagh's preoccupations at this time, this makes particular sense. The most obvious singularity in her *Madeleine Guérin* is that the peasant girl - hemmed in as she was by poverty, lack of education, and inability clearly to express her aims - is freed by her ability to transcend that social expectation of inactivity. When the general themes of Kavanagh's non-fiction are taken into account, a clear pattern appears; all her women - whether she approves of them or not - were achievers, the novelists, the saints, the charitable activists, even the courtesans. Her view of a female contribution in politics, religion or literature is essentially simply that such women did contribute. While she clearly seeks to establish that these contributions were of a specific nature, kindlier, more nurturing, her selection of women like de Tencin and Aphra Behn suggests that Kavanagh, albeit reluctantly, conceded a certain primacy to the mere fact of activity.

Though Kavanagh was to put aside the more obvious elements of her Francophilia for a while in her next two novels, the strongly marked ambivalence about the religious life, and to marriage, were to become plainer in later works. Plain and realistic though much of *Madeleine* is, familiarity with the later works gives a distinct suggestion that some of its obvious ease arises from the fact that its story enabled the young author to avoid all discussion of matters which touched on sexuality and submission; *Madeleine Guérin* enjoys the calmness of an ascetic lifestyle without the obedience to authority that would have come with entry into a religious order. It is not inconceivable that the element of fear which enters into some of Kavanagh's discussion about marriage (noted by Shirley Foster in connection with *Adèle*) is as much to do with the idea of submission of the self as of fear of physical sexuality. Certainly, the conflict between age and experience (with its concomitant elements of authority and submission) which runs throughout the developing relationship between de Sainville and Nathalie Montolieu foreshadows more extreme variations on the theme in later, less critically successful works. Here, however, Kavanagh was able to hold several of the elements that were to characterise her work in a successful balance, and it is this

balance which made the work a popular and critical success when it was first published and which help it retain some of its power and freshness today.

Notes

- [1] Brontë, Charlotte, *Shirley: A Tale* (Oxford, OUP, 1979) p. 5
- [2] Oliphant, Margaret, "Modern Novelists - Great and Small" in *Blackwoods Edinburgh Magazine* 77: May 1855 p. 559
- [3] Quoted in Lohrli, Anne (compiler) *Household Words* (Toronto, 1971).
- [4] Kavanagh here misquotes Wordsworth's "She was a Phantom of delight"; the first line of the quotation should read "A creature not too *bright* or good". If the quotation was drawn from memory, it throws an interesting sidelight on Kavanagh's individual response to Romanticism.
- [5] a) Foster, Shirley, "A Suggestive Book": A Source for Villette', *Etudes Anglaises*, T.xxxv, No. 2, pp. 177-184;
b) Colby, Richard, *Fiction With A Purpose* (Bloomington & London, 1967) pp. 196-197.
- [6] Kavanagh, Julia, *Nathalie, A Tale* (London, 1850) Vol. I, pp. 1-2. All page references are to the single volume edition of 1854.
- [7] *ibid.*, p. 12.
- [8] *ibid.* pp. 26-27
- [9] In fact, Kavanagh appears to have been fond of the Normandy peasantry; many of the short stories she produced through her career, and collected in the posthumous *Forget-Me-Nots* centre on the imaginary Norman town of Manneville, (not the real-life hamlet of that name) in which the foibles of regional character are treated with good-humour and affection. Her treatment of "Sainville" therefore appears to be adopted for specific effect.
- [10] *op. cit.* Vol. I, p. 46
- [11] *ibid.*, Vol. I, p. 75.
- [12] *ibid.*, Vol. I, p. 111.
- [13] *Athenaeum*, No. 1203 (16 November 1850) pp. 1184-5. The review speaks of "the delicate touches and attractive pictures which place "Nathalie" high among books of its class, and which will be recognised by most select readers of novels as distinguished from romances." It also notes that though "Nathalie would hardly have been born if Currer Bell's daughter had not been her ancestress ... the rest seems to us all her

own. A sentiment, a tenderness, an old world French grace are commanded by her which are as individual as they are elegant. She is almost among the novelists of England what Madame Charles Reybaud is among the novelists of France; and this, according to our rating, is praise of mean order."

- [14] Foster, Shirley, *Victorian Women's Fiction: Marriage, Freedom and the Individual* (London and Sydney, 1985) p. 18.
- [15] It is worth remarking that, according to C. W. Wood's short biographical note to the posthumous *Forget-Me-Nots*, Kavanagh's own mother Bridget was blind, and contemporary obituaries record that Kavanagh had to devote most of her time to looking after her, fitting her writing into short intervals. There is, however, no suggestion that her relationship with her mother was anything other than an affectionate one; indeed, one book of fairy stories, *The Pearl Fountain, and other fairy tales* (London, 1876) is credited to both women. It is probable, therefore, that Kavanagh used a situation with whose difficulties and potential difficulties which she was personally familiar, and transformed it for dramatic purposes.
- [16] *ibid.*, Vol. I, pp. 262-264
- [17] Austen, Jane, *Mansfield Park* (Harmondsworth, Penguin, 1966) pp. 125-127. See also Tony Tanner's Introduction, pp. 26-27.
- [18] Kavanagh, Julia, *Nathalie*, Vol. 1, pp. 31-42.
- [19] *ibid.*, Vol. 2, pp. 1-27.
- [20] *ibid.* Vol. II, pp. 69-71.
- [21] *ibid.* Vol. II, p. 115
- [22] *ibid.* Vol. III, p. 76.
- [23] *ibid.* Vol. III, pp. 147-148
- [24] Brontë, Charlotte, letter to Julia Kavanagh, dated 21 January 1851.
- [25] Kavanagh, Julia, *Nathalie* (London, 1857) Vol. III, pp. 200-201
- [26] As an interesting footnote, not noted by Foster, Nathalie replaces a series of unsatisfactory teachers, one of whom "objected to having her letters opened, and left in consequence." (Vol. III, p. 208), yet another indication of the possibility that Mme Dantin provided some seeds of Mme Beck in *Villette*.
- [27] *ibid.* Vol. III, pp. 281-282
- [28] *ibid.* Vol. III, p. 301
- [29] *ibid.* Vol. III, p. 310
- [30] Stoneman, Patsy, *Brontë Transformations: The Cultural Dissemination of Jane Eyre and Wuthering Heights* (Hemel Hempstead, Prentice Hall, 1996) pp. 18-22.

Chapter 8: *Rachel Gray: A Tale.*

The publication of the single-volume novel *Rachel Gray* in 1856 is one of unusual interest in a study of Julia Kavanagh's work. It gives the opportunity to consider what turns her career might have taken had she not been so strongly influenced by Brontë's *Jane Eyre* at the beginning of her career, and had continued on the path she had set with *Madeleine*. Admitting in her Preface that she had deliberately sought to work in the style of what had proved her most popular work, Kavanagh returned to some of its characteristics as a mature writer. The novel is, however, also fascinating for what it seems to reveal about its reticent author, both in terms of her circumstances when she first began to write, and in what it suggests about her relationship with her father, Morgan Peter Kavanagh.

To its first readers, with the possible exception of close friends, that personal element must have been obscure, until Kavanagh felt impelled to write to the *Athenaeum* a year or so after *Rachel Gray* was published. Even so, despite references in a number of mentions of Julia Kavanagh to the events that occurred over the publication of her father's novel *The Hobbies*, no connection appears to have been made between one of the central situations of the novel, a young woman abandoned by her father, and Kavanagh's own situation. This must largely have been due to the lapse of time between the two events, since Kavanagh's Preface is unusually clear in stating that the novel had a factual basis. That preface, since it illuminates a range of motivations for publishing *Rachel Gray*, is here given in full:

This tale, as the title page implies, is founded on fact. Its truth is its chief merit, and the Author claims no other share in it, than that of telling it to the best of her power.

I do not mean to aver that every word is a positive and literal truth, that every incident occurred exactly as I have related it, and in no other fashion, but this I mean to say: that I have invented nothing in the character of Rachel Gray, and that the sorrows of Richard Jones are not imaginary sorrows.

My purpose in giving this story to the world is twofold. I have found that my first, and in many respects, most imperfect work "Madeleine," is nevertheless that which has won the greatest share of interest and sympathy; a result which I may, I think, safely attribute to its truth, and which has induced me to believe that on similar grounds, a similar distinction might be awarded to a heroine very different indeed from "Madeleine," but whose silent virtues have perhaps as strong a claim to admiration and respect.

I also had another purpose, and though I mention it last, it was that which mainly contributed to make me intrude on public attention; I wished to show the intellectual, the educated, the fortunate, that minds they are apt to slight as narrow, that lives which they pity as moving in the straight and gloomy paths of mediocrity, are often blessed and graced beyond the usual lot, with those holy aspirations towards better deeds and immaterial things, without which life is indeed a thing of little worth; cold and dull as a sunless day.

London

JULIA KAVANAGH

December 1855

It is clear that Kavanagh is saying something important to her, but the circumlocutory argument is not an easy one to follow. Those who were familiar with Kavanagh's earlier work, however, would realise that the "truths" she refers to in the first two paragraphs are those most important to her; religious, moral and emotional verities. Those who knew something of Kavanagh's background might have recognised a possible reason for her comment, and might well have brought their reading of *Rachel Gray*, and that knowledge, to bear when a curious and heated exchange broke out in the columns of the *Athenaeum* the following year. Since the particular relevance of the novel to Kavanagh personally offers an unusual opportunity to examine her approach and motivations, this will be considered first. Following that, some of the other aspects of the novel will be summarised and discussed.

It must have been some surprise for readers of the *Athenaeum* of June 30 1857 to find the notably “safe” writer Kavanagh submitting herself to public notice by denying editorship of a novel, *The Hobbies*, written by her father and published by Newby, perhaps the most notorious of the major Victorian publishers. A vigorous correspondence ensued, during which Newby defended himself, claiming that he had Mr Kavanagh’s assurance that the work had been edited by his daughter, that he had seen amendments in her writing, and that it had previously been offered by her to another publisher on that basis. Kavanagh’s reply was evasive, avoiding any comment on whether she had or had not edited her father’s novel, but asserting only that she had never authorised the use of her name in that connection. Finally, the *Athenaeum*, having seen the manuscript with annotations by Julia Kavanagh as described by Newby, closed the correspondence.

The humiliation must have been great for Kavanagh, exposing her family’s troubles to the world at large. Newby’s claim to ignorance over those troubles may have been genuine, but the rift between father and daughter had come much earlier, as shown by Charlotte Brontë’s description of their only meeting in a letter to Ellen Nussey dated 12 June 1850:-

She (Kavanagh) lives in a poor but clean and neat little lodging - her mother seems a somewhat weak-minded woman who can be no companion to her - her father has quite deserted his wife and child - and this poor little feeble, intelligent, cordial thing wastes her brain to gain a living. She is twenty five years old.^[1]

It is difficult to avoid the likelihood that much of the background, and a significant plot element, of *Rachel Gray* has its origins in the circumstances, some years earlier, of Kavanagh herself. That significant plot element is the relationship between Rachel Gray and her father Thomas. If we are able to construct something of Kavanagh’s own relationship with her abandoning father from the novel, it may offer a significant sidelight on the *Hobbies* controversy. Despite the inevitable problems of drawing biographical inference from an author’s fiction, the situation Kavanagh draws between Rachel and her father is so unusual as to invite such speculation; it is by no means a staple of Victorian fiction.

Even the supposedly factual elements of the *Hobbies* controversy are speculative to a degree, for the correspondence in the Athenaeum constituted a vigorous argument over the truth of whether Kavanagh did, or did not, collaborate with her father on *The Hobbies*. The first letter to be published came from Kavanagh:

“We print the following as we receive it:-

“London, June 9

“Mr Newby of Welbeck Street having, during my absence from England, and without my cognizance, published a new novel in three volumes called “The Hobbies” on the title-page and in the advertisements, of which it is stated to be “Edited by Julia Kavanagh,” I am under the painful necessity of stating that my name has been affixed to the book without my knowledge and consent, and that I have, consequently, instructed my solicitors to take such legal measures as will compel Mr Newby to withdraw my name from the title-page and advertisements of this work - I remain, &C.

JULIA KAVANAGH”^[2]

The fact that the publisher was Newby adds a further level of obscurity to the controversy, for he was by no means the most reputable or reliable of men; he had, indeed, been the man who held the copyright of *Wuthering Heights* and *Agnes Gray*, and whose advertisements hinted that “Currer Bell”, the author of the highly successful *Jane Eyre*, was one and the same as “Ellis and Acton”. His business methods were sufficient to sink the first novel of a young Anthony Trollope without trace. Nevertheless, his response adduced a number of circumstances which tend to give his claims of innocence some credence, though it is noticeable that he is at pains to reinforce the one circumstance Kavanagh avoided mentioning in her letter, that the author of *The Hobbies* was her father:

“Mr Newby writes in explanation of the appearance of Miss Kavanagh’s name - without her personal consent- on the title-page of “The Hobbies,” - against which appearance she has protested in our columns:-

“30, Welbeck Street, Cavendish Square, June 16.

“I am sure I need make no apology for requesting the insertion of the following statement of facts, in reply to a letter which has been printed in your paper from Miss

Julia Kavanagh, which absence from town has prevented me from sooner noticing. Nearly twelve months since, Miss Julia Kavanagh's father brought the manuscript of "The Hobbies" to me, with a view to its publication, telling me that a considerable portion of it had been written by his daughter, who had carefully revised the whole as its editor. The MS fully bore out this statement, inasmuch as I found a large part of it, as well as innumerable emendations, in Miss Kavanagh's handwriting. I was also shown several letters of Miss Kavanagh's in which she wrote in high terms of the merits of the work, and her having made such alterations as she thought would make it acceptable to the public. These circumstances, and the fact of her having previously offered the work to one of the leading publishing firms in London for publication, on the understanding it was to be announced as edited *by her*, I undertook the publication on Mr Kavanagh's express written authority to publish it "as edited by his daughter, Miss Julia Kavanagh, Author of "Nathalie", "Daisy Burns" &C., the said work having undergone the editorial work of the said Julia Kavanagh." I was unaware when I accepted the work that unhappy family differences had arisen between Miss Kavanagh and her father: nor had I any reason to suppose that any objections existed as to the use of her name as editing her parent's work. Immediately, however, on being requested to do so, a new title-page was printed and sent to every library to which copies of the work had been sold: and in further compliance with Miss Kavanagh's request, her solicitor was promised that, immediately after my return to town, the fact would be announced to the public in a form that was most agreeable to her wishes. I was, therefore, much surprised - and I think I have reason to complain of Miss Kavanagh's publishing her letter of the 9th inst., threatening me with the penalties of the law, when she could not fail to be aware that everything, and even more than any legal proceedings could have effected, had already been done by me to comply with her wishes, and that if any ground of complaint existed, it ought rather to be settled between her father and herself than between herself and me.

"I am, &C., T. CAUTLEY NEWBY"^[3]

It must be said of Newby's letter that it is a masterpiece of misdirection; Kavanagh's original letter is so clearly prompted, in its demands and language, by legal advice that his attempt to paint her as having taken precipitate action is unconvincing. Clearly, he had not troubled to consult

her, despite having had a year to do so. Nevertheless, his assertion that the manuscript bore clear evidence of Julia Kavanagh's intervention is a weighty one. To some extent, that view is substantiated by the narrow focus of Kavanagh's further correspondence on the subject:-

"We give the following as we receive it:-

"Mr Newby, with the view of extenuating his conduct in putting my name as Editor on the title-page of "The Hobbies" without my consent, has asserted that I had previously sanctioned such an announcement being made by another publisher. I am therefore compelled distinctly to say that this is the reverse of the truth, as I positively refused to allow my name to be made use of. I purposely confine myself to this point, because the other circumstances alluded to by Mr Newby have no bearing on his unwarranted use of my name. I also wish to add, that before writing the letter which I addressed to you on this painful subject, I ascertained from him that he had been unable to see Mr Newby, that he had not heard directly from him, and that he was not aware of any steps having been taken to withdraw my name from the title-page of "The Hobbies," copies of which book, with the first title-page, I know to be at the libraries and in circulation at the time.

" I remain &C. JULIA KAVANAGH"^[4]

The clear implication of this letter was that, at some point in the past, Kavanagh had been involved in negotiations with another publisher over "The Hobbies". That, in its turn, could only mean that she had been, to an unascertainable degree, involved in editorial work on the manuscript. For reasons which must remain conjectural, she had refused to allow the use of her name. At that point, whether it was her father who had misled Newby, whether it was Newby to blame, or whether the two men had colluded over the use of Kavanagh's popular name as a selling point, her desire for anonymity had been overridden. There is, indeed, some pointer to the fact that Newby felt himself innocent of malpractice in the final word on the subject by the *Athenaeum*:-

We are tired of the controversy about "The Hobbies", and trust we shall have no need to publish further correspondence on the subject. We must, however, state that Mr Newby has placed in our hands a copy of a letter from which we gather that Miss Kavanagh

formerly offered the novel to Messrs. Chapman and Hall, and proposed to edit it for them

[5]

For the sake of completeness, the review of *The Hobbies* by the *Athenaeum* needs to be quoted; in part it reads:-

“The Hobbies” is, on the whole, the most foolish novel we have ever read: its publication is an insult to the public; and that Miss Kavanagh should have strictly refused to be mixed up with it was not only a natural impulse of self defence, but an act of good sense which she owed to her own self-respect.^[6]

The outline facts are clear; Kavanagh and her ailing mother had, for several years, (probably since at least 1847, when W S Williams had clearly outlined some degree of difficulty in Kavanagh’s circumstances to Charlotte Brontë) been abandoned by her father. At some point prior to mid 1856, when Morgan Peter Kavanagh brought his manuscript to Newby, Kavanagh had been in contact with her father, and, for reasons which remain unclear, was actually seeking to make his novel publishable. She wished to keep that involvement secret; whether it was prudence for her literary reputation, as the *Athenaeum* suggested, whether she had fallen out again with her errant parent, or for some other reason, we can only guess. A difficulty with her father seems an inadequate reason, since, if we read the careful elisions in her explanations, she was probably already insisting on her involvement remaining secret at the time she was seeking to place *The Hobbies* with Chapman and Hall. The more probable explanation, therefore, may have been the attitude of her mother. Bridget Kavanagh’s affliction was blindness, not the feeble-mindedness attributed to her by Brontë; she remained intellectually adequate to converse in French in her latter years, and to make a gift of her daughter’s portrait to the National Gallery of Ireland, after Kavanagh’s death. More importantly, though she bore the name Kavanagh during her daughter’s lifetime, she subsequently reverted to her maiden name, even, apparently, changing the attribution of the only book she wrote with her daughter so that a late edition is credited to her as Bridget Fitzgerald. That suggests a distaste, at the very least, for her husband that lasted for many years, and it was perhaps this that urged her daughter to secrecy.

That leaves unexplained why a young woman who had been abandoned by her father, and left to fend for both herself and an ailing mother, should have become embroiled with him in a venture which threatened the professional standing she had painfully acquired, and the livelihood of herself and her dependent mother. Kavanagh's heroines, though invariably pious, are usually very independent; that she herself shared some of these traits is clearly established by the way in which she carved out a successful literary career while looking after her mother. It seems likely that there must have been something unresolved and powerful in the nature of her relationship with her father which prompted this unlikely gesture on her part. It is that relationship which appears to be powerfully reflected in *Rachel Gray*.

The relationship between Julia and Morgan Kavanagh had, of course, two sides. We can, through her novels, hazard some guesses about the religious, moral and behavioural tenets which governed Julia Kavanagh's life. There is little to be gained, on the other hand, from a study of Morgan Peter's work, other than to identify his ambition for literary or scholarly success. This ambition was a thwarted one; the critical treatment meted out to *The Hobbies* was kindly compared to the damning verdicts on his eccentric philological works. In terms of biographical data, however, we have little beyond the correspondence in the *Athenaeum* and the single comment by Brontë.

What we do have, on the other hand, is the portrait of the relationship between the eponymous heroine of *Rachel Gray* and her father. If its ambiguous preface has any discernible meaning to the reader, it is that it tells a psychological, and perhaps a moral truth. We know from the evidence of *Madeleine*^[7] that Kavanagh could distil the central facts of a true-life original into a fictional form; that work has as its core a reworking of the life of Jeanne Jugan, a poor servant girl who founded a hospital and the Little Sisters of the Poor. There is a great deal to suggest that, in the case of *Rachel Gray*, Kavanagh plundered her own life for the situation of her heroine; indeed, to draw on her preface, it seems not unlikely that the story of Richard Jones, the failed shopkeeper of the novel, also had at least one counterpart in life. Rachel, like her creator, is single, physically unattractive, and devout. She is the breadwinner for her stepmother. She lives and works in a part of London that seems very close to the milieu in which Brontë met Kavanagh; furthermore, the novel

appears to be set in the mid to late 1840s, from the references to the Chartists. It was precisely at that time that Kavanagh's personal circumstances must have been at their worst. And, most crucially, Rachel Gray and her stepmother have been casually abandoned by her father.

The portrayal of the relationship between Rachel and her father is so unrelentingly harsh in the early part of the novel that it is almost of a different order from anything else Kavanagh ever wrote. She can give no psychological reason for the blank indifference of Thomas Gray to his daughter, yet it is an entirely convincing portrayal. The reaction of Rachel, on the other hand, is clearly understood. When a character defeats the understanding of an author, yet is both convincing and the cause of reactions that seem true to life in others, there must be a suspicion that there has been some drawing from life.

Because of the potential importance of such a fictionalised relationship to an understanding of Julia Kavanagh, the first part of this chapter therefore concentrates on this aspect of *Rachel Gray*. The novel as a whole will be considered later, though other elements of the story as they reflect on and contrast with the relationship between Rachel and Thomas Gray will be drawn on as appropriate. It is, however, necessary to realise that the story of Rachel and her abandoning father are, in some ways, almost at odds with other elements of the novel; elsewhere in the book, the dependence and vulnerability of poverty are major themes, but they play little part in the story of a father and daughter who are almost equally on the edges of poverty.

Kavanagh deploys the skill she was capable of in matching an environment to the moral and emotional struggles of her characters in her first introduction of Thomas Gray. The whole of the second chapter is devoted to introducing the extraordinary situation. Rachel, having told her stepmother she will go home, goes instead on a journey through night-time London. There is no indication at first of what is driving this quiet, withdrawn, young woman through sordid districts, where she is abused by a group of drunken woman and has her pocket picked. Typically, her reaction is not either anger or sorrow at the loss of the few shillings that are all she has, but to lament that there is so much sin. She arrives at last in a poor district, and stands in the dark shadows of the street, to watch through the lighted window of a small carpentry shop. The tall, thin,

grey-haired and wrinkled man working inside is her father. Watching him, hale and strong for his years, she weeps, but does not enter:

“Why must I stand here in darkness looking at you? why cannot I go to you, like other daughters to their father? why do you not love your child?”^[8]

Rachel is Thomas Gray’s daughter by his first wife; on her early death, he had married Rachel’s stepmother. The latter, though good in her harsh way, shows little affection; nevertheless, it is more than she received from her father. To Thomas Gray,

almost from her birth she had been to him as though she did not exist - as a being who, uncalled for and unwanted, had come athwart his life. Nor had he, to her knowledge, taken her into his arms or on his knee; nor had he kissed or caressed her: never addressed her one word of fondness . . . or even common kindness . . . a deep and incurable indifference.^[9]

If, as seems likely, we have here a father drawn in part from Kavanagh’s own experience, there is a reasonable chance that the character of Rachel Gray will itself bear some resemblance to that of its creator, to the extent that it bears upon the father/daughter relationship. We have evidence from Brontë’s letter describing their meeting that Kavanagh was living in poor lodgings, and was engaged in a fairly difficult struggle to make a living. It seems likely, despite the change of occupation, that the circumstances of Rachel draw on her creator’s own experience; given the claim on both the title page and in the preface to the novel that it is based on truth, it becomes difficult to avoid the implication that that relationship is itself closely drawn from real experience, and all the personal circumstances of Julia Kavanagh point to that circumstance being her own. Although she describes the sorrows of Richard Jones, the failed grocer in the novel, as real ones, we need not infer that his relationship with his daughter had any similar basis in life; on the contrary, it seems more than likely that Kavanagh created that loving relationship as a counterpoint to that of Rachel and her father and a touchstone of what she imagined a good relationship to be. Certainly Jones’ daughter is the “solitary delight of his hard-tasked life”^[10], and Mary Jones, unlike Rachel, is fond, but complacent about her father’s efforts on her behalf.

While Richard Jones will walk five miles each way to visit his daughter after a day's hard work, and be contented with a glimpse of her sleeping face, it is always Rachel who goes to her father. The description of Rachel's first meeting with her father since the death of her half-sister Jane many years before has a brutality about it which is uncommon in Kavanagh's work. and confirms the impression that this is at least part of the truth to which her preface refers. She has secretly worked on some fine shirts as a present for him, and at a particularly unhappy time, plucks up the courage to go to him. At first, he appears not to recognise her.

"My name is Rachel," she said.

He said nothing.

"Rachel Gray," she resumed.

He looked at her steadily, but he was still silent.

"I am your daughter," she continued in faltering accents.

"Well !I never said you was not," he said, rather drily. "Come, you need not shake so; there's a chair there. Take it and sit down."

Rachel obeyed; but she was so agitated she could not utter one word. (p. 128)

Her present is disdained;

"Why, my good girl," he said, "I have dozens of shirts - dozens!"

Rachel looked up into his face; she sought for something there, not for love, not for fondness, but for the shadow of kindness, for that which might one day become affection - she saw nothing but cold, hard, rooted indifference (p. 129).

Only one further scene in the novel could be based on the relationship of Morgan Peter and Julia Kavanagh. In Chapter XI, Rachel's stepmother dies, forgiving the husband who abandoned her. Shortly afterwards, Rachel herself is ill for several months, but as she recovers, she goes to Thomas Gray to bear his wife's last message. While there, she asks him if she can live with him and take care of him. Once again, his response is recounted with a stark brevity and harshness which may stem from Kavanagh's own experience.

He had heard her out very quietly, and very quietly he replied: "Rachel, what did I go to America for?"

Rachel, rather bewildered with the question, faltered that she did not know.

“And what did I come to live here for?” he continued.

Rachel did not answer; but there was sad foreboding in her heart.

“To be alone,” he resumed; and he spoke with some sternness, “to be alone.” and he went back to his planing.^[11]

From this point on, the relationship between Rachel and Thomas Gray can no longer be based on the author’s own experience. If the correspondences between fact and fiction had a basis in reality, as seems likely, they tell us something of what Kavanagh observed of her father’s attitude towards herself and her mother, and what her own confused response to that was. The later parts of the novel can tell us nothing further about that, but, once the personal element is accepted, they tell us much about an unexpectedly dark side to Kavanagh’s character. In effect, that part of the later novel which deals with Rachel’s response to her father can be seen as a wish-fulfilment fantasy on Kavanagh’s part which is unexpectedly revealing of her unconscious.

Immediately after the exchange between Rachel and her father quoted above, she pleads with him to think of what she might do for him should he become ill. The old man becomes angry, telling her that he is never sick. She leaves, despairingly. Later that day, however, she convinces herself that she should try again, and returns to the shop late that night. Despite the late hour, it is open and lit, but there is no sign of her father. After searching around the area, she notices that a lighted window upstairs, and goes up to find her father rigid in his chair. The doctor she calls tells her that he may live for years, but will never recover his mind. She takes him in, but when her landlady - her stepmother’s sister - finds she is harbouring the man who deserted her sister, she is furious. “Do you know I could turn you out on the streets, you and your beggarly father - do you know that?”^[12] Rachel finally mollifies Mrs Brown, but at the cost of giving up her independence to the overbearing woman, who moves in.

Although Mrs Brown herself dies within a short time, leaving Rachel the house, giving her some peace after long years of struggle, she still longs for the affection that her father will never now be able to give. The rest of the book is principally concerned with the parallel story of Richard Jones and his daughter, as his business fails, and his daughter contracts a fever and dies. Jones is shattered

by his loss, and Rachel, while comforting him, as she had earlier prepared Mary for her death, is still left with only the mindless old man, with his parrot phrase of "Never mind". It is only in the final chapter that Kavanagh allows her heroine a pale ghost of the love she has always craved. After several years, as she helps the old man to his chair, Rachel detects a faint light in his eyes. She presses him as to whether he knows her, and out of his confusion, he finally looks at her and says "Rachel."

Her father knew her, he had uttered her name with kindness, in his feeble and childish way he loved her!.^[13]

In the final page of the book, Kavanagh has to make the point her faith demanded of her - while her Rachel still wishes that the faint affection of her father could have been given in health and understanding, she can tell herself that she still has the love of her Father in Heaven. That is Rachel's faith. It is difficult, despite Kavanagh's fierce piety, to be as certain of *her* sincerity on this single occasion. In the context of the author, rather than her character, there seems to be a certain desperation, as if she is clinging to the idea for comfort. She could scarcely be unaware that, if her heroine was her alter ego, she was wishing a hideous fate on her real father, at the same time as she was picturing "Rachel" taking care of him against all the odds that a difficult life could produce.

The conjecture can be taken still further; Morgan Peter Kavanagh had perhaps received some help in editing *The Hobbies* from his daughter in a futile attempt to win his love and approval. She was a skilled writer; though she might, perhaps, have attempted to sell the idea of an uncompleted novel to Chapman and Hall, her experience might very quickly have shown her that the work was unsaleable, save to someone like Newby, who often worked in essence as what today would be termed a vanity publisher. If the coldness and indifference of Thomas Gray are modelled on Kavanagh's father, they are of a piece - though Gray is not portrayed as a dishonest man - with Morgan Kavanagh's willingness to compromise his own daughter's reputation by using her attempted help to help sell his worthless work. (In fairness, it seems likely that he himself would not have considered it worthless; his philological works are not simply eccentric, but bear the imprint of a vain and self-centred personality).

Rachel Gray appears to reveal much; while an effective novel in itself, it throws more light on its author's emotional world than anything else she wrote. Her fiction and non-fiction alike is evidence of her moral and religious views, but the closeness to her own most personal experience in this one work allows it to show not only the values she upheld, but also the struggles and temptations against which she maintained those values. It is significant that the novel contains little - apart from the deaths which come to most characters in their time, and only Mary prematurely, (and which were the stock-in-trade of many contemporary novels) - which is other than a realistic depiction of a level of society which would not be within the direct experience of many of Kavanagh's readers. There is ample indication that this intentional realism might well have been a natural reflection, for the author, of a very real emotional situation on which she drew.

The remainder of *Rachel Gray* is less revealing of its author's emotional life, but it does, in many ways, offer a remarkable picture of a particular stratum of Victorian society with which Kavanagh appears to have been very familiar. It is also a milieu which was not particularly the subject of novels, being that of those respectable urban workers who maintained a poor, but respectable condition of life. The action, apart from visits to Thomas Gray's workshop, is largely set in or around a single depressed street, unpopular even with the poor. Rachel is far removed from Kavanagh's other heroines, except for Madeleine and perhaps Daisy Burns as a child. She is a 26-year-old dressmaker, living with her ageing stepmother, and with two apprentices. A tall, thin, awkward woman, she appears several years older, "sallow and faded before her time". She has a patient seriousness, and a sweet smile and fine eyes; slightly deaf, she speaks little. She does, however, have a powerful inner life; in the opening chapter we find her dreaming about the past. In a reverie triggered by the closing crocus in her window, she recalls a school holiday when, with her young half-sister Jane, she first saw the flower in bloom. Jane died aged 13. Mrs Gray regards Rachel's reflective moods as "moping", but it is essential to her nature. Later, having been criticised by a rich customer and sneered at by the woman's servant, she can find comfort in a single star in the night sky - "God made that star for me, as well as for her" (p. 20).

Although the relationship with her father is the sharpest thorn, Rachel's life is shown as starved of affection. Only her dead half sister had ever shown her real love. Her stepmother had shown tenderness only to her own dead child. Rachel has only one real solace, the few precious times she can find for solitude. In Chapter 3, she is alone in the rear bedroom, looking out of the window. "To think was her delight; a silent, solitary, forbidden pleasure, in which Rachel had to indulge by stealth". It is from this vantage point that she watches another solitary figure, Mme. Rose, a tiny, poverty-stricken old Frenchwoman, for some reason cast up in London, and barely able to speak English; dependent herself on charity, the old woman nevertheless takes on others still more unfortunate, including an idiot girl. It is interesting to note that Kavanagh describes the old woman's room in terms of Dutch genre paintings; George Eliot, who reviewed *Rachel Gray* sympathetically but critically in *The Leader*, finding Kavanagh's treatment of the speech patterns of the poor unconvincing, was later to use a similar analogy herself in *Adam Bede*.

It seems extremely likely that Kavanagh was much more conversant with the lives of her shabby Londoners than Eliot, whatever the latter's facility in representing common speech. The crux of the book, apart from the father-daughter relationship, is a small tragedy of working-class people trapped in an environment of unforgiving economics. The principal character here is Richard Jones, devoted father of Mary, one of Grace's two apprentices. It is this part of the plot which is considered at some length by Kestner^[14], who treats Kavanagh as part of a tradition of women social novelists including "Charlotte Elizabeth" (Tonna) and Harriet Martineau. Kestner notes, principally on the strength of *Rachel Gray*, that Kavanagh "pioneered . . . in the sober, unadorned depiction of the working and managerial classes."^[15] While Kestner's work seeks to place Kavanagh as a significant writer, his arguments for that reassessment are not wholly convincing, since they are based almost entirely on the atypical concerns of *Rachel Gray*. His examination of the novel is, however, of some interest, placing it, as he does, against the contemporaneous *John Halifax, Gentleman*^[16] with its theme of social advance through hard work. The comparison serves to highlight the extraordinarily hard-headed approach which Kavanagh takes to the social conditions the novel portrays. Kestner

defends Kavanagh against one judgement in George Eliot's review of the novel, when she takes the author to task for an authorial interjection:-

Where are ye, elements of power and pathos of our modern epic: the novel? A wretched shop that will not take, a sickly child that dies? Ay, and were the picture but drawn by an abler hand, know, proud reader, if proud thou art, that thy very heart could bleed, that thy very heart would be wrung to read this page from a poor man's story.^[17]

Eliot had seen this as a weak, feminine, scolding of the reader; Kestner correctly identifies it as a comment on the faults of the social narrative genre, with its concentration on excess and pathos. Nonetheless, Eliot's comment is not wholly misjudged; the passage in question, whatever Kavanagh's intention, draws the reader away from the mainly unvarnished details of a hard and unrewarding life, which Eliot's review elsewhere correctly identifies as "the every-day sorrows of our commonplace fellow-men".^[18]

The social milieu which Kavanagh is describing is given particular emphasis by one characteristic which must - given the unusual freedom with which Kavanagh's heroines usually have in travelling - have been consciously adopted by the author. Apart from her visits to her father's shop, all of Rachel's life, and almost all of Richard Jones' actions in the narrative, are bounded by a few mean streets. The physical horizons reflect the social and economic horizons of the characters. If Kavanagh was, in part, confronting a major trauma of her own life in the treatment of Rachel's relationship with her father, it is possible that, having made that step, she found herself able also to express her concerns about the nature of her society and its treatment of the poor. It is, elsewhere, a rarity for Kavanagh to express a political sensitivity (although it is worth recalling her sudden savagely pointed remark when discussing Edgeworth's *Castle Rackrent*: "Why should the possession of large landed estates imply such terrible power? ... The question was one day put in France, and the whole world knows how it was answered")^[19]. That same sense of the unjust power of wealth informs the Richard Jones subplot of *Rachel Gray*. On the strength of a small inheritance, Jones, having noticed the lack of a grocer in Rachel's locality, sets up an undercapitalised business. At first it thrives, then a larger business, able to buy in bulk and undercut Jones on price and quality,

opens opposite. Kavanagh offers no solutions, either theoretical or narrative; Jones is ruined. She maintains a formal obeisance to the ruling ethic of her day, but Kavanagh's dislike is apparent:

The great shop must prosper; 'tis in the nature of things; and the little shop must perish
- 'tis their nature too. We but lament this sad truth, that on God's earth, which God made
for all, there should be so little room for the poor man . . . ^[20]

For once, Kavanagh allows herself to reflect the religious doubt of the oppressed, when Jones asks Rachel “. . . You tell me God is good - mind, I don't say he ain't - but is he good to me?”

^[21] The silent Rachel has no answer to give except her own support.

Untypical in almost every way, *Rachel Gray* ends without success, for Rachel, Richard Jones or any of the characters. It faithfully records the dull minutiae of hard-tasked lives with little to show but continued struggle. It offers no heroic characters; Rachel is bullied, first by her stepmother and then by that stepmother's sister. Despite the faint flowering of recognition by Thomas Gray for his daughter at the end, it is impossible to feel - whatever personal meaning it may have had for the author- that this is anything but a travesty of what Rachel had hoped for. Even the final reflections by Rachel on the love of her heavenly Father are hard to read as anything other than a desperate grasping after comfort. Nonetheless, the bleakness that pervades the novel is not without hope of a kind, because, at the end, Rachel is a symbol of survival of the human spirit in an uncaring world. There is an integrity to Kavanagh's unsparing approach which singles out *Rachel Gray* as a deeply felt work, springing from rather more than the simple wish to emulate the success of *Madeleine* which she claims as its inspiration.

Notes

[1] Letter to Ellen Nussey dated 12 June 1850. The breakdown of the Kavanagh family probably predated 1850; W.S. Williams of Smith, Elder certainly wrote to Brontë about difficulties of the then 22-year-old Kavanagh in 1847.

[2] *Athenaeum*, No. 1546, June 30 1857, p. 761 - "Our Weekly Gossip"

- [3] Ibid., No. 1548, June 27, 1857, p. 822
- [4] Ibid., No. 1549, July 4, 1857, p. 854.
- [5] ibid, No. 1551, July 18, 1857, p. 909.
- [6] The author has read *The Hobbies*; the *Athenaeum* judgement is not unjustified. The work bears no resemblance to Julia Kavanagh's novels either in style or content, though she may well have tidied up some elements. The nature of the work - though, to be fair, strongly suggested in the title - is an unpleasant one, consisting largely of a parade of unpleasant monomaniacs, including a bookseller who cannot bear to part with books, a miser, a hypocrite etc. All of them are shown as solely motivated by their individual obsession, and each, tellingly, if we are to take the hints about Morgan Kavanagh offered by *Rachel Gray*, entirely self-centred, and verging on the sociopathic. At the very least, it seems to have been written by someone with a deeply jaundiced view of human nature.
- [7] Kavanagh, Julia *Madeleine, A Tale of Auvergne, Founded on Fact* (London, Bentley, 1848)
- [8] Kavanagh, Julia, *Rachel Gray; A Tale, founded on fact* (London, Hurst and Blackett, 1856) p. 27
- [9] ibid. pp. 28-29
- [10] ibid. p. 75
- [11] ibid. p. 202
- [12] ibid. p. 234 -
- [13] ibid. p. 332
- [14] Kestner, Joseph, *Protest and Reform: The British Social Narrative by Women 1827-67* (London, Methuen, 1985) p. 4
- [15] ibid. p. 4; although Kestner bases his discussion purely on *Rachel Gray*, both *Adele* and *John Dorrien* feature managers of businesses, in William Osborne and the eponymous hero respectively.
- [16] Craik, Diana Mulock, *John Halifax, Gentleman* (London, 1856)
- [17] Kavanagh, op. cit., pp. 314-315
- [18] Eliot, George, "Rachel Gray" in *Leader*, 7 (5 January 1856) p. 19

- [19] Kavanagh, Julia, *English Women of Letters* (London, 1862) Vol. II, p. 169.
- [20] Kavanagh, Julia, *Rachel Gray; A Tale, founded on fact* (London, Hurst and Blackett, 1856) p. 273.
- [21] *ibid.* p. 298.

Chapter 9: *Adèle: A Novel.*

In the course of this examination of Kavanagh's work, a number of specific examples of her style have been cited, particularly in regard to *Madeleine* and *Nathalie*. These have not, however, included an extended examination of the author's style or narrative technique. This chapter attempts, on a small scale, to remedy that omission by providing a study of a single chapter of *Adèle*, the text of which is reproduced as Appendix 1, before discussing the novel as a whole.

To minimise the need for extensive plot summary, this detailed analysis is limited to Chapter II of the novel, in which the eponymous heroine and some other characters are introduced, and the scene for much of the novel's action is set. This avoids the necessity for extensive narrative background. It is worth noting, in the context of the chapter, the quotation from one of Wordsworth's "Lucy" poems which Kavanagh uses on the title page:-

She dwelt among the untrodden ways,

* * * * *

A maid whom there were none to praise

And very few to love."

The chapter itself is titled "How the world was going away in the Manor of Courcelles". All line references refer to the Annex.

The single sentence opening paragraph is abrupt, designed to arouse the curiosity of the reader for an explanation, and suggestively atmospheric, with its repeated "The world is going away". There is every evidence that this technique of using an evocative and tantalising opening was deliberate. Chapter I, which introduces the hero, opens with the still more startling "The funeral was over", while the following chapter begins with the comment of the old servant Jeannette "Sad

changes and sad times". In the case of Chapter II, however, the opening words do not merely engage the reader's attention. The sense of loss which they summon up provides a leitmotif for concerns which are extensively, if obliquely, explored throughout the chapter, through the very different viewpoints of the speaker Mademoiselle de Janson, old Jeannette the servant, and the young Adèle de Courcelles. The question posed is, moreover, resolved in the final words of the chapter.

The question of loss and change posed in the opening sentence is intertwined with ideas of tradition and youth, (a subsidiary theme of the whole novel) and the second paragraph (l.2-6) brings these elements into immediate play, with its description of the ancient hall of the Manor. Certain elements of the juxtaposition are dextrously and suggestively placed by Kavanagh. There is a repeated emphasis on height and depth in the description of the old oak-panelled room, as if it overwhelms the figures within, and this is neatly and unobtrusively given an emotional dimension by being observed for the reader through the medium of Mademoiselle de Janson's "melancholy" look. At the same time, the massive room is also associated with a sense of slowness - the fire does not blaze, but is described as "smouldering" (l. 4). It comes as a slight shock, therefore, when the sentence moves seamlessly on to the figure of Adèle, her slightness in the imposing room lent compound emphasis - "diminutive figure" and "little", on a "low stool". At the same time as this physical frailty is emphasised, it is accompanied by a first hint of the girl's equally fragile dependency; she is a goddaughter. In the final sentence of the paragraph, Kavanagh swiftly suggests the effect of the environment on the young girl, her hands clasped protectively around her knees before a "dying" fire, her face wistful.

Thus far, and with considerable subtlety, Kavanagh has, in a mere 80 words, set a physical milieu, a relationship, and the suggestion of a complex emotional pressure on the young girl. In the next brief sentence, however, she hints at a resilience in her young heroine, when with compounded innocence, pertness and practicality, Adèle asks "Where is the world going to, Cousine?". (l. 7) Since these are the first words spoken by Adèle in the novel, they have a certain narrative importance even though Kavanagh is principally concerned to establish the physical milieu and immediate relationships of the heroine. They also leave some ambiguity about the speaker. The

eponymous Adèle is clearly a central character, but her words, coupled with her physical description, indicate nothing of whether she will prove actively resourceful, or a semi-passive pivot for the narrative. All that is immediately clear is that she is very young.

Immediately, however, Kavanagh contrasts Adèle with the mature Mademoiselle de Janson. That comparison is neither explicit nor forced, but quickly establishes the girl as both more practical and more positive than her godmother. The older woman revels lugubriously in her self-dramatizing but unspecific complaint, then collapses into a faintly theatrical *ennui*. (l. 8-10) It is then we learn that Adèle is genuinely, if only temporarily, puzzled by her Cousine's statement. However - and here Kavanagh displays for the first time her heroine's natural capacity for seizing life - she quickly turns to thoughts of how beautiful Mademoiselle de Jansen was and is. (ll. 11-14)

At this point, Kavanagh employs a successful narrative strategy, from line 13 to 36 which allows her to pursue her narrative on a series of inter-related levels without any apparent hiatus. That the compact complexity in which these few paragraphs are articulated imposes so minimally on the consciousness of the reader is a mark of Kavanagh's now mature technique. Adèle's contemplation of her godmother's beauty is rapidly followed and subverted by a passage hinting further at Mlle de Janson's self-absorption - "Open the window child," . . . "it is quite close", and revealing that Adèle has a mind of her own, yet subject to bounds whose nature - love or duty - the reader does not yet know - "Of course it is with a fire," thought Adèle, but she did as she was told (ll. 15-16).

The next four brief paragraphs (ll. 17-21) of conversation between Adèle and her cousin flesh out both the affection which the young girl has for her godmother and the latter's singularity. It is made clear that Mlle de Janson's valetudinarian ways are largely an affectation, but her eccentricity is real; after her "feeble" protestation of a headache, the exchange becomes faintly surreal, when Adèle asks if the older woman is sure it is her head (presumably suspecting some sadness from the earlier distracted conversation). Mlle de Janson's reply allows Kavanagh to bring out not only the woman's oddness, but also her self-absorption, as she turns the reply into a study of

her favourite subject, herself: "Well, . . . I am not; strange I should not know, is it not?". The conversation ends with a small hint of Adèle's unwordliness, when she replies with a simple "Very" but continues to admire her cousin.

Since neither of the two can be effectively used to give an unbiased, adult view of the older woman's character, Kavanagh now shifts to omniscient narration. Typically, however, she uses the next paragraph to give straightforward details of Mlle de Janson's appearance, history and situation, while retaining a strain of uncertainty about the wellsprings of her character by calling on the divergent opinions of others. By affecting coyness about de Janson's age, Kavanagh artfully suggests that the lady would be equally reticent on the subject. At the same time, the reported impressions of others at lines 23-24 convey the additional suggestion that the woman is talked about, divides opinion, and is of some social standing. Kavanagh biases her reader's reception of these social impressions of de Janson; those who consider her mad are not categorised, while those who support her eccentricities are "indulgent"; the inference is that a degree of tolerance needs to be exercised by those who come into contact with her. Kavanagh does not explicitly set out the reasons that such indulgence may be forthcoming, but lets the evidence accumulate through the paragraph. We learn of her beauty, a fortune reduced by her dead father's gambling which might attract some sympathy, and of her aristocratic breeding. Against this, however, Kavanagh describes her unambiguously as "peculiar, capricious to the tip of her fingers, perverse in her ways, neither amiable nor kind".

The paragraph also allows Kavanagh to outline quickly the salient points of her present circumstances. The neglect of the Manor is due to her lack of money, and she is, it transpires, solvent only because of her lease of a forge let to an English capitalist on an endless lease; the forge is an affront to her aristocratic sensibilities. Although Kavanagh deliberately leaves the capitalist as a nameless nonentity - the mere existence of the forge is the source of Mlle de Janson's abhorrence - the alert reader will have made some connections with the dead Mr Osborne of Chapter 1 and the mention of "a French connection", which offers the first tenuous link with the English milieu of that

chapter. There is sensitivity in this; the two households have as yet no connection with each other, and the deliberate obliquity of Kavanagh's approach reflects that.

Nevertheless, the forge is important; in the next paragraph, (ll. 37-41) Kavanagh sets out its significance for de Janson. It is an obsession with her; although she accepts her new poverty, Kavanagh describes the forge as an intense irritant to her senses - as sight, it is "visible from every window; as sound, its clanking is heard in every room. The extent of this - clearly a physical impossibility - anthropomorphises the building for the woman; she "abuses and hate[s]" it, perceiving it as an enemy, until it has become one of the chief preoccupations of her existence.

The next paragraph (ll. 42-45) provides a revealing contrast. By the simple device of having Adèle rise to look through the Manor window, her response to the same surroundings - about which the chapter is particularly concerned - are revealed. In contrast to her godmother's neurasthenia, Adèle sees a pastoral wildness, with a silent lake, rugged roads about a silent lake, and intensely beautiful under a summery sky.

Again, Kavanagh turns to a few paragraphs of speech (ll. 46-51) which reiterates the disparate sensibilities of the ill-matched pair. Although Kavanagh chooses to let the point speak for itself, Adèle's next words are clearly triggered by the conflict between her godmother's unhappiness and the undimmed day outside, when she asks her cousin to explain how she knows the world to be going away. The answer is an exasperated complaint about the noise of the forge, and a demand that Adèle go out to play with her doll. The answer takes us back to the poverty of the two in the crumbling Manor - "I have no doll, Cousine" - before Adèle is sent out to the garden to play.

Adèle leaves, with Mlle de Janson repeating her mournful complaint behind her, and we are given a brief insight into the young girl's own life, as well as her comparative innocence of adult complexities, as she gently chides herself for being so happy, in the face of her godmother's repeated warnings - "I sleep as well, and eat and drink as heartily, and run and laugh, and sing, and enjoy myself, just as much as if the world were standing still the whole time".

The next paragraph is simple description, which serves to emphasise the shabbiness and solidity of the old house. The one which follows (ll. 65-74) appears superficially to continue that description as Adèle moves through the old courtyard. In fact, however, it subtly prefigures a complexity of themes which recur throughout the novel. the first, a comparatively minor element, is the weight of tradition of the de Courcelles name, as the courtyard is described as massive and confining; the shade “seemed to dwell there for evermore”. Concurrently, however, there are signs of the tenacious vitality with which the chapter increasingly associates Adèle, in the ferns and flowers which fill the crannies. The inhibiting cold and stillness of the manor is further reinforced by the description of the reflection of the sky at the bottom of the old well “reflected in a cold white circle”. At the end of the paragraph, however - in a description faintly reminiscent of Lewis Carroll’s *Alice in Wonderland* - Kavanagh introduces the low passage to a green and sunny garden.

The next paragraph offers further clues to the nature of Adèle through her surroundings. Kavanagh neatly suggests the energy of the young girl by having her pass through the courtyard, peep at the well and through the corridor to the garden “whilst we have been describing”. The garden itself mixes together a sense of open space and freedom with both formality, reflecting the history of the Manor, and decrepitude, with its broken statuary. That mixture leads straight into a description of the only other character in the chapter, old Jeannette, the peasant servant. The conjunction is important to understanding the nature of the old woman, which is expanded later in the chapter. Here she is associated both with nature - sitting in the sun, “brown as a nut” - and with a certain formality in her dress. Kavanagh makes it clear that they like each other, and are comfortable enough to need little conversation.

After a brief exchange, Adèle sits watching the spinning wheel, and while she is at rest, the author takes the opportunity (ll. 88-112) to describe her and her history. Doing so at this point in the chapter has allowed the reader’s curiosity to grow with the clues Kavanagh has provided, and incidentally enhances the impression deliberately created in Adèle’s passage through the courtyard of the author having difficulty in keeping up with the young girl. The physical description shows a pretty but immature girl of sixteen, intelligent but with a hint of indiscipline. Kavanagh follows this

with a summary of her life to date, as a poor orphan now the last of the ancient line of the de Courcelles who had built the manor, and wholly dependent on her godmother. It is in the last of the three paragraphs of description that Kavanagh turns to the character of the young girl and introduces clearly the effect of her strange upbringing at the hands of the melancholic de Janson. Adèle, she writes, had “grown up as she pleased”, and that way is summarised in a list of negatives - “untaught, unloved, unchecked, and unheeded”. After this, it comes as a slight surprise to learn that Adèle is happy, until that is linked with the word “liberty”. This is to be a major theme of the development of the heroine, and it is immediately followed by a sentence which again links the young girl to natural fecundity, with comparisons to wild flowers, garden blossoms and weeds, and the significant verb “flourished”.

Kavanagh follows this with an abrupt summary of Adèle’s attitude to life, (*ll. 113-114*) and the warning that “temper, character, story, she as yet had not”, clearly telling the reader that these are to be the subject of the novel. This authorial dissertation on the heroine is ended by a resumption of conversation by Jeannette, with what will, throughout the book, be her preoccupation, the great past of the de Courcelles for whom she works. She speaks of the former wealth of the family, particularly Adèle’s great grandmother the Marquise, while the disinterested girl barely listens, and finally runs off into the garden. (*ll. 117-129*)

The remainder of the chapter comprises three long paragraphs, on the surface largely scenic description, first of the old garden, (*ll. 130-138*) then the lake at its foot, (*ll. 138-148*) and finally the old orchard beyond it, to which Adèle walks, eats a peach, and rests in the grass. The descriptions are, however, replete with images which are important to the themes of *Adèle*. The gardens, once magnificent and formal as Versailles, are run down but offer “space, air and liberty”. Its civilised space, we learn, is set in wilder country, with “wild” hills, forests, and a “silent” lake. The lake - which serves a number of important narrative functions as the novel progresses - introduces more ambiguous descriptions; its sleep is “enchanted”, it leaves “heavy wet mosses” on the stone parapet, and its bed is chill, deep and dark”. It too is a part of nature, but it is the older, dangerously untamed side.

When Adèle leaves the end of the garden for the old orchard, however, the descriptions emphasise the bounties of half-tamed nature. More importantly, Adèle is seen at total peace in this sunlit place, and the burgeoning maturity of her coming womanhood is suggested by the images of natural fecundity which come thick and fast, from the “scattered trees (which) bent to the very earth their fruit-laden boughs” to the high grass which closes round her. The passage also repeatedly mentions the creatures - a blackbird, a speckled thrush, bees - which share this half-wild place with the half-wild girl. The association of the girl with a sense of ripening is complete, when Kavanagh tellingly suggests a biblical image as the innocent girl plucks and eats fruit from the tree.

In the final paragraph (ll. 159-165), Adèle rests in the grass, “happy, like any wild and careless young thing”, breaking into song, before thinking in answer to Mlle de Janson’s complaint “Oh, no! the world is not going away; it is coming, coming fast.”

In this chapter of *Adèle*, not much can be said to happen; two desultory conversations and a walk in the grounds of an old French manor are an accurate, if unperceptive summary. Kavanagh has, however, given an insight into the character and history of her young heroine, and suggested that this, for Adèle, is a Garden of innocent Eden from which she will shortly be cast out into the harsher world of adulthood.

Adèle is the highest point of Kavanagh’s work in the genre she adopted from Brontë. In it, she has the confidence to handle the demands of the three-volume novel without digressions and with a strong overall grasp of the development of her central character. Indeed, she takes that development to new lengths, since her heroine moves from child to unhappy married woman to an adult resolution of her life, effectively in three related sequences. The chapter examined in detail above is - as Kavanagh all but makes explicit - concerned with the young girl barely emerging from childhood, and, as such, the raw material for the developments that follow. The other principal character, William Osborne, was introduced, with his family, in Chapter 1; he too is clearly at the opening of a new life, when with the death of his father, from whom he has long been estranged, he

is faced with a largely collapsed business and the task of providing for his stepfamily, the second Mrs Osborne, her son and two daughters.

For Osborne, like Adèle whom he has yet to meet, freedom is coming to an end. The only



Frontispiece to the 1862 edition

viable part of his late father's business is the forge at Courcelles. The manor had been leased by his father, and Mlle de Janson and Adèle have the legal right only to a few now decrepit rooms, though they use it all. The manipulative figure of the second Mrs Osborne, William's stepmother, is the source of almost all the novel's developments. Having dominated her first, French, husband, she had intended to do the same with her second, only to find herself baffled. One of her ploys, taking advantage of old Osborne's Catholic faith, was to propose the priesthood for William, to secure the inheritance for her own children. Now, as a widow, she seeks to manipulate her stepson to her

advantage, when she moves into the manor with William and her two daughters. He, for his part, is well aware of her character but feels bound by his dead father's wish that he should take over the business and provide for his stepfamily. The scene is set for a collision between the child/woman with her wonted freedom and the older man deprived of it. This forms the first of the three major stages of the novel. The second is when Osborne - not out of love, but from a sense of duty - marries Adèle. He does so because his stepbrother has misappropriated trust funds which support the girl and her godmother, but in doing so, he falls deeply in love with her, while she, in her turn, finds this suffocating, so that she longs for her lost freedom. The final phase of the novel is the reconciliation of the two into a mature relationship while Osborne's stepmother strives to separate them and take control of her stepson.

During the first of these three phases, the lake below the manor plays a significant role in which its metaphorical meaning is constantly modulated by Kavanagh. The first, in which it hints of danger, we have already seen in the analysis of Chapter II. Later, it becomes associated with barriers of understanding, both between some of the adult characters and between the young girl and her mature understanding of the adult world. This particularly relates to Adèle's friendship with the woman who lives across the lake, Mme Alice Lascours, who, it gradually becomes clear, had once been the object of William Osborne's affections, until she had been pressed by her mother to marry a rich older man. Hearing of the Osbornes' imminent arrival, and knowing her husband would be displeased by any new discourse between the families, Alice comes to the Manor to let Mlle de Janson and her goddaughter know that she will not be visiting the manor in future (p.19: all references in this part of the chapter are to the single-volume 1862 edition)). Both the theme of danger and that of barriers are invoked later, when Adèle, asked by Osborne to arrange the posting of an urgent letter to England for him - he is trying to circumvent his stepfamily and the forge manager, M. Morel, who are plotting against him - decides to undertake the task herself. Avoiding the pursuit of Morel, who attempts to intercept the letter, Adèle crosses the lake to a nearby town, Nantua, and on returning with the boatman is caught in a storm and almost drowned, providentially on the Lascours' estate.

A further use of the lake hints at the crossing between childhood and adulthood, signified when Osborne, who has become paternally fond of the young girl, arranges for her to attend a play at the theatre in Nantua. Adèle watches the play raptly, with the enthusiasm of childhood, while Osborne, for convention's sake, leaves her, though the sharp-eyed Jeannette sees him watching and tries vainly to warn her young mistress. At this stage of the book, Kavanagh derives much comedy from the attempts of others - both Jeannette to protect her mistress and the Osbornes lest William take a wife and will away his estate - to prevent a love match between Osborne and Adèle, a development which neither of them has in mind at this point. A particular instance is when Adèle is apparently anxious for Osborne's return from business, which rouses everyone's suspicions; what she actually wants is the second volume of a discarded novel she has picked up (p. 46).

There is one other major appearance of the lake in this early part of *Adèle* which is of unusual interest; to recompense the young girl for her help, Osborne takes her and Jeannette in his sailing boat on an excursion along the lake to an abandoned monastery. The old place fills Osborne with sad musings on an age which has abandoned this old house of God, but Adèle's reaction is wholly that of a healthy child. Osborne hears the sound of her feet inside the old building and looks in. Adèle is on the table:-

On that table, where Prior, reverently bending had once pronounced the pious Benedicite . . . Adèle with cheeks flushed, and dark hair unloosened by the motion of the dance, was now waltzing in circles so rapid, that Mr Osborne, surprised at the novel sight, and dazzled by her swiftness, could scarcely follow the motion of her waving skirts and little flying feet on the table; for hardly had she reached the centre, when she was at the edge again, and seemed fairly over. In a moment, one step brought her back, but she only reached safety to seek new danger; and so she went on, evidently as much in her element as sylph in the air or salamander in the flame.

It is a vivid picture of a young girl filled with a joyous vitality and appetite for life, seeing nothing of danger, and dancing in an instinctive response to her world. What is remarkable is that it predates by seven years another novel in which a young woman similarly expresses her vitality by dancing alone, and it is tempting to wonder whether Tolstoy, with his wide reading of foreign novels, had read *Adèle* before writing the scene in which Natasha Rostova dances at her "Uncle"'s lodge in Book Two, part 4 of *War and Peace*.^[1]

To a limited extent, this first phase of the novel allows a limited awareness of adult duties to Adèle; on Osborne's first arrival at Courcelles, she makes herself responsible for securing a meal for him in the face of limited provisions, and there is a certain amount of maternal instinct in her response to his daughter (Osborne is a widower) when she arrives. The child, Lilian, incidentally, is a well realised portrait of a pleasant but spoiled and self-centred child which provides something of a foil for Adèle's natural and untaught good nature. When Osborne determines to marry Adèle as the only recompense he can make for the misappropriation of her money by his stepbrother Robert,

however, the young woman is ill-prepared for the translation into her new domestic life. At first, he is prompted almost wholly by duty, as he confesses to Mlle de Janson:-

“No, I do not love her according to your meaning of the word, but I wish to marry her, and to make her as happy as I can. I wish to be happy with her too. No, I might not have thought of marriage if Robert had not robbed her. But if I were not fond of her, if I did not feel that I could be fonder of her still, and make her fond of me, I would not add to the wrong she has already suffered a wrong far deeper. I would not give her a cold and careless husband.” (p. 149).

When the newly married pair return from their honeymoon to Courcelles, however, Adèle is ill and strained; Shirley Foster has commented that her depression, which stems from the realisation that she has lost her freedom, is accompanied by hints of sexual fear.^[2] Kavanagh writes of the disparity between her imagination and the reality of marriage, after Osborne has found himself unexpectedly in love with his little wife:

Her husband had prepared her for a life calm though happy, for an affection serene though deep, and instead of that, he had borne her into a region of passion and exacting fondness, which she had never, even in thought, conceived, which she was too young and too careless to like, too ignorant to understand.

While the element of sexual panic is certainly present, however, it is the loss of her old way of life which tells most strongly. Jeannette is bold enough to ask, when Osborne is absent on business, why her mistress did marry him:

“Besides, it seemed a beautiful and a noble thing to be the wife of William Osborne. Say to a peasant girl, will you be queen, wear a crown, sit on a throne, rule a land, and never stir without a bodyguard to attend you? She will clap her hands and cry Yes. Ah! how she will repent it! how she will wish her crown were on a bush, and that her people had another ruler! How she will long to run bare-foot in the dew of the morning - how she will break her heart because she has lost liberty; liberty without which there is no blessing.”

(p. 188)

The language and metaphors are those of fairytales; Kavanagh is making clear that Adèle has lost not only the freedom which has been the pattern of her young life, but also childhood itself. The portrayal of her as at the cusp of womanhood which was so clearly indicated in the close reading of Chapter II is at the heart of her distress; the safety of childhood has slipped away, and she longs for it. It is in the next chapter, Chapter XXIX, that Adèle meets with her first real test of adulthood, when her husband's stepmother and her two daughters arrive suddenly with the intention of staying for the winter, unaware that William has married. With Jeannette's timely advice, Adèle triumphantly establishes her position as mistress of the house.

Such strength is necessary, because, with the exception of William Osborne, women are the dominant characters in the book, whether for good or ill. As well as William's stepmother and Mlle de Janson, there is Isabella Osborne, a strong-willed and headstrong young woman seeking a wealthy marriage, and the formidable Madame de Launay, a shrewd old peasant who has risen to commercial wealth and power. Against all of these, Adèle eventually triumphs, with the greatest struggle that against Mrs Osborne who fights tenaciously to establish control over William.

The nature of Adèle's struggle against Mrs Osborne in particular is simultaneously the story of the way in which she brings her marriage to a stable harmony, and in this there is a strong subtext which hints at what Kavanagh herself regarded as a worthy marriage. If the first phase of the book was that of the child-woman and the older man, and the second that of the child-bride, the loved and humoured pet of a busy husband, the final part of the story is that of Adèle achieving equality with her husband. There were hints of this in the early part of the novel, when she crossed the lake to post the vital letter to England for him, but that lesson was lost to William in the early days of their marriage, when Adèle was coping with her bewildering new status. This process is confused still further when Adèle Osborne learns the reason why William had married her, when she is told by the vindictive Isabella, who pretends that she believes Adèle to have done so knowingly:

"he offered the only reparation in his power, marriage, which was accepted. He acted as a man of honour, and you as a prudent girl. Do not imagine I blame either of you, but I must say I consider all this pretence of love very ridiculous." (p. 252).

Adèle determines not to tell her husband she knows of this, but he overhears a conversation between her and Mrs Osborne. It is this conversation which Kavanagh marks explicitly as Adèle's clear step from child to woman - "... no more a careless girl, but an indignant woman, giving back defiance for insult, and for scorn a scorn more deep." (p. 259). William determines to remove his step-family from his house, but Adèle pleads successfully for him to fulfil his obligation to his father's wish.

The final test of Adèle's marriage comes when William falls ill with typhus at a time when a malicious plot of the discharged manager Morel has blackened Adèle's reputation through forged letters to William's business partner de Launay. Mrs Osborne, though aware the correspondence is faked, burns the letters, pretending to her stepson that it is to protect him. Adèle, led to believe her husband believes the calumnies against her, leaves the Manor, and Mrs Osborne uses the control William's illness gives her to lock Jeannette in her room and prevent Adèle's re-entry to the house. Adèle, however, as a child long used to climbing about the old building, regains the room after learning of her husband's illness from the doctor, and Mrs Osborne's plotting is defeated.

The ending of the book - Mrs Osborne and her daughters are fully provided for by Isabella's marriage to the Baron de Launay, and Morel is never heard of again - is an example of a characteristic feature of Kavanagh's work. Retribution is almost absent from her work; the punishment of the wicked is limited in this world to the disappointment of failure. This aspect of Kavanagh's fiction will be considered more fully in Chapter 10. In *Adèle*, however, Kavanagh makes explicit her view that blessings, as well as retribution, are God's gift, though they may come on earth as well as Heaven:

The bequest of his father had made him meet Adèle, the dishonesty of his brother had given him his wife, the very perversity of his family had bound him to her more closely, more tenderly, than his own love and indulgence. A prophet once went forth to pronounce a curse, and his tongue could only utter a blessing: all toil, all evil had turned to good for William Osborne (p. 430).

Notes

- [1] Tolstoy, Leo (trns. Rosemary Edmonds) *War and Peace* (Harmondsworth, Penguin, 1957) p. 604

- [2] Foster, Shirley *Victorian Women's Fiction: Marriage, Freedom and the Individual* London and Sydney, Croom Helm, 1985) p. 19.

Chapter 10: Kavanagh's fictional universe - recurrent themes

The selective chronological approach adopted so far in this examination of Kavanagh's work has limited the opportunity to consider recurrent motifs, attitudes and character types across the whole range of her work. This chapter, however, will examine a number of characteristic themes which recur throughout her fiction (and, occasionally, in the non-fiction). These are not intended to be more than representative - others could no doubt be identified - nor are they ranked in any order of importance. Some of these recurrent ideas in her work concern attitudes, while others are characteristic situations and combinations of characters which repeat themselves throughout her work.

As a very broad generalisation, however, these themes can be divided into two main groups, though inevitably they blur and overlap. The first may tentatively be designated as characteristics of the "public" Kavanagh (though such a description is necessarily limited, given her personal reticence). In this category we can include those themes which reflect views and attitudes which Kavanagh actively and consciously sought to promulgate. They include the underlying attitudes of most of her non-fiction, particularly on the role and contribution of women. These are extensively dealt with elsewhere, in discussion of the non-fiction (see Chapters 4 and 5). To these themes can be added some of the subsidiary attitudes to, for example, passion, or on education. A considerable bulk of this group are concerned with ideas stemming from Kavanagh's strong religious faith, intermixed with the most conservative aspects of her personality.

The second group of themes are equally frequently encountered, though mainly in the fiction, but they have, in many cases, little or no obvious correlation with the ideas which Kavanagh overtly espouses. To a significant extent, this class of thematic material arises particularly in terms of

recurrent situations or characters. Their use appears to be largely undetermined by conscious ideology or opinion; on the contrary, their appearance tends to function as a determinant of the development of each story, in a way which overt beliefs does not. The pattern of this is sufficiently marked, when Kavanagh's works are considered as a whole, to allow the tentative conjecture that some of the situations and themes to be considered arise from Kavanagh's personal experience. The fragmentary nature of the biographical material available for Kavanagh allows this possibility to be tested only in a limited way, but such evidence as there is can be used to support the view that Kavanagh did in part use her stories - whether consciously or not must remain a matter of doubt - to explore some of her personal feelings and experiences.

It is highly possible that Kavanagh deliberately used incidents and situations from her own life as the basis for some of her work; what seems unlikely, given her abhorrence of public attention, is that she realised how the use of such incidents revealed her own private emotions. Inevitably, of course, given the limited information available on Kavanagh's private life, any attempt to relate these themes and attitudes to any particular cause would be fruitless, but the internal consistency of these elements across the range of her work is nevertheless indicative of some personal significance for the author.

A selection of these recurrent motifs are discussed under appropriate headings. It should, however, be borne in mind that although these different strands can easily be distinguished, their regular coexistence in many works indicates that, for Kavanagh, they were interrelated. Alternatively, the themes of orphans and inadequate parents do not, for obvious reasons, occur simultaneously, but may be regarded as alternative approaches to ideas of self-reliance and abandonment, both of which were part of Julia Kavanagh's own experience.

The orphans

It is fair to say that, even by the standards of mid-Victorian authors, Kavanagh disposes of an unusual number of parents. It is a truism that the propensity of nineteenth century and earlier authors for orphans had many sound justifications from a writer's viewpoint; the lack of parents

allowed heroes - and more especially heroines - a degree of freedom which convention would not otherwise grant them. Furthermore, where parent substitutes - guardians or others - were introduced, they opened, for a novelist, the possibility of exploring disagreements and tensions. Those frictions might, in many cases, exist within a family of blood relations; nevertheless, by removing the condition of absolute loyalty which the codes of Victorian patriarchy decreed as normal, they could be explored in a context in which that convention was weakened, and the possibility that a son, daughter or wife had personal rights could be discussed with some objectivity. No doubt much of this applies also to Kavanagh's heroines - for such they are until late in her career - but it seems probable that she brought other, more personal considerations to bear which may also relate to the allied themes of sexualised children and the motif of the inadequate parent or parent figure.

Kavanagh's first novel, *Madeleine: A tale of Auvergne*^[1] already shows some divergence from the normal conventions of the orphan heroine. Madeleine is clearly a young woman outside the normal conventions from the beginning of the novel. She is not antagonistic to those conventions, but simply rather detached from the life of her community as the result of a retired upbringing. Throughout the novel she stays in her native village of Mont-Saint-Jean. Indeed, as the story progresses, she moves physically and emotionally closer to the heart of the village. Thus, her orphan status does not offer the traditional opportunities for wanderings and calamity; instead, it offers in her the possibility of a wholehearted devotion to God and to good works.^[2] Certainly, there remain parallels between Madeleine and the majority of her fictional orphan counterparts; the novel portrays the growth and realisation of an aim, and the attainment of that aim against obstacles, much as would be the case in any other orphan novel. However, the gradual process of growth would be possible with or without a parent; indeed, the way in which Madeleine gathers her enfeebled old people around her suggests a family relationship in which she takes the role of parent. (The real-life origins of Madeleine make it difficult to determine whether Kavanagh was partly reflecting her own situation with her mother; at the least, those circumstances may explain why Jeanne Jugan's story was of such interest to Kavanagh that she used it on three separate occasions). Her independence is,

in the role she sets herself, an advantage to her as character, rather than to the novelist as plot device.

In *Nathalie, a Tale*,^[3] Kavanagh uses the device of the orphaned young woman in peril in a largely conventional fashion to free the heroine from some conventional restraints. Unusually, however, there are two orphans, the second being Nathalie Montolieu's sister, Rose. Because the lives and characters of the two sisters are so different, Kavanagh is able to stress the secondary importance of opportunity arising from the weakening of those bonds of conventionality and the primacy of individual character. While Kavanagh weights the scales in her treatment of the two young women by making Nathalie Montolieu beautiful and Rose plain, there is nevertheless a degree to which both start from a similar position, under the control of demanding old women, so that their difference in temperament is stressed. Thus, while the device of the orphan provides opportunity, more personal characteristics determine the outcome of that opportunity. Those personal characteristics are of some importance in the construction of *Nathalie*; Kavanagh in part uses the sisters as depictions of two different kinds of heroine, the secular and the saintly, and, because of their close relationship, hints also at a duality in the nature of good women. It is certainly an ambiguity which seems to have existed in the attitudes of Kavanagh herself.

In *Daisy Burns, a Tale*^[4] some of the odder aspects of Kavanagh's treatment of orphans begin to come to the fore. Much of this will be treated more fully in the discussion of Kavanagh's treatment of children's sexuality and inadequate parents below, but the figure of Daisy's grandfather is noteworthy. She becomes his ward when her father dies, and his treatment of her is distant and arbitrary. He drops and resumes his interest in her on little more than self-indulgent whims. Of the brother and sister who do bring up Daisy, one marries her when she grows to adulthood, while the other was in love with Daisy's dead father.

It is clear that there is something complex and unusual in Kavanagh's attitude to parents, and in particular to fathers. Much of that peculiarity, and its probable origins, have been discussed in relation to *Rachel Gray* in Chapter 8. Before that, however, there was one of her most striking failures, *Grace Lee*, which deals again with an orphaned girl. In this novel, Kavanagh for once uses

the figure of the orphaned young woman in the most usual way as a plot device, giving her heroine freedom to act in ways which would otherwise have been impossible within contemporary society. At the same time, however, she uses Grace to explore the idea of something close to total freedom for a woman, by making her one of the richest women in England. The novel was found wanting by critics, as fantastic, but in fact its failure does not lie in this central situation, which promises much and occasions some satirical views of the mercenary motives underlying society. It is, rather, because Kavanagh appears to lose her way with this theme, and interweaves tired stock situations from late eighteenth century novels to pad out her three volumes, ending it in an almost perfunctory way. In this latter part of the work, Grace's position as orphan is barely touched on.

Rachel Gray, in that eponymous work, is not strictly an orphan. As discussed in Chapter 8, her father is alive, yet Rachel has all the characteristics of the orphan, and that similarity to the treatment of, in particular, Rose Montolieu in *Nathalie*, strongly reinforces the impression that in many cases Kavanagh's use of the orphan has its roots in a sense of abandonment as much as of loss. Orphaned girls - and in the case of *John Dorrien*^[6] an orphaned young man - continue to occur throughout her work. In *Adèle*^[7] the twin elements of loss and abandonment are subtly intertwined; the heroine is an actual orphan, a situation with which she is quite content, not remembering her parents, and at the same time is first emotionally and then actually abandoned by her godmother, whose rooted self-absorption is not dissimilar to that displayed by Thomas Gray in *Rachel Gray*. That unexpected contentment with her life is a significant element in *Adèle*, since it is a corollary to her freedom. Adèle is a "child of nature", a situation highlighted by the title-page quotation from Wordsworth's "She dwelt among th'untrodden ways" and emphasised with the scene in the old orchard (see Annex). Her broken health when she loses that freedom on marriage recalls the real-life crisis of Emily Brontë, when removed from her home.

The sexualised child

Where Kavanagh deals with pre-adolescent children, an unusual and occasionally disturbing note recurs. It appears from her treatment of these children that the author herself saw nothing unusual or exceptionable in her characterisations, and, indeed, she appears wholly unaware of what

she was doing. Nevertheless, there is a distinct undertone of sexuality in the behaviour of some of these young people, mainly girls. That is not to say that anything physical occurs, but it seems clear that Kavanagh's children tend to exhibit a distinct heterosexual focus in their relationships. Indeed, some of the failure of Kavanagh's third novel, *Daisy Burns*^[8], may have been due not simply to its weak construction, but to readers' discomfort at the portrayal of Daisy. Unmistakably, the devotion which Daisy exhibits towards the young ex-pupil of her father who brings her up has sexual overtones. This is largely manifest in the intensity of Daisy's emotional attachment to Cornelius - significantly stronger than that she displays towards his sister Kate who is equally concerned in her upbringing - but is also tactile from a very early point.

I passed my arms around his neck, and asked again, "Will you take me with you?"

"Why do you want me to take you?"

The strange, unconquerable shyness of childhood was on me, and rendered me tongue-tied. Cornelius gently raised my face, so that it met his look, and smiled at seeing it grow hot and flushed beneath his gaze. (Vol. 1, p. 43)

Although Kavanagh had dealt with a substantial age gap in *Nathalie*, her heroine was eighteen - by mid-Victorian standards, of a normal age for marriage. Daisy, however, is pre-pubertal, no more than ten when she first goes to live with Cornelius O'Reilly and his sister Kate. Though child prostitution was by no means uncommon in Victoria's England, and the age of consent when Kavanagh wrote was 12, this does not in any way reduce the shock of Kavanagh's almost unconscious acceptance of these issues. It says nothing about any erotic fixation by an adult male for a young girl; rather, it accepts without comment the proto-sexual attraction for a very young girl for a man. The jealousy which consumes Daisy when Cornelius becomes involved with their mysterious neighbour Miriam is quite apparent. This, at a time when harsh comments had arisen, only six years earlier, over the open feelings of Jane Eyre for Rochester, is remarkable. There was no obvious public shock about the subtext of *Daisy Burns*, but it is possible that the critical response to it as poor and fantastic may have partly arisen from unease and reluctance to admit any recognition of the topic. (That is not to avoid the fact that the novel is both lazily plotted and an adult version of the Ugly Duckling story, but the strength of the criticism seems excessive on these

grounds alone.) Perhaps the most curious element is Kavanagh's apparent oblivion to what she was describing, a situation which apparently failed to strike her throughout her entire career, when she created the character of Lily Bertram in her final completed novel *Two Lilies*.^[9] Miss Bertram is first met as a chatterbox child who annoyingly attaches herself to the central character, Edward Graham, aggravating him as he decorously pursues the other Lily of the title. Some years later, thwarted in his pursuit of Lily Scot, Graham returns to England, helping, en route, to aid Miss Bertram to escape her guardian under French law, Mr Lennard. When Edward and Lily Bertram next meet, some years later, she has become a beautiful young woman, with whom he falls in love. Naturally, the child who once pursued him relentlessly - 'he had a feeling that this little girl ... would stick to him like a leech, and he was not mistaken' (p.46, 1889 edition)- is now cool and unapproachable.

A rather less disturbing version of the sexualised child occurs in many of the short stories, where the situation is more often young teenage male and younger girl; the pattern recurs in, for example, "At The Well" and "Nina the Witch", collected posthumously in *Forget-Me-Nots*, the title story in *Seven Years and Other Tales*, and "John's Five Pound Note", the story she contributed to the Victoria Press's *Victoria Regia*.

Only in *Adèle*, discussed at length in Chapter 9, does Kavanagh appear to have sought to explore this situation, though the eponymous heroine is adolescent when she meets William. Nevertheless, Kavanagh still appears blind to what she is describing, with the young girl clearly struck by the handsome new master of the Manor of Courcelles yet driven to ill health by his tenderness when they marry. There is clearly a dichotomy between the unmistakable sexual nature of her attraction and her inability to cope with the outcomes of that attraction; it is not unreasonable to suggest that something of those attitudes were entirely guilelessly those of the author. A possible conjecture is that - if the theories put forward in Chapter 8 concerning the nature of Kavanagh's relationship with her father are correct - her unsatisfied need for paternal recognition and affection may have led her, in youth, to an unusually strong tendency to seek affection from substitute father

figures. There can be no evidence for this, but if this were true, Kavanagh may have been ingenuously representing in fictional form her own youthful behaviour.

The inadequate mother

Where Kavanagh's characters do have parents, or parental substitutes, there appears to be a gender pattern in their characterisation. Mothers, in Kavanagh's fiction, have a marked tendency to inadequacy in their care for their children. This is strongly the case where the central character is involved. (Less frequently, Kavanagh tends to depict the mothers of male characters as obsessively concerned to protect their son's interests, such as Mrs Osborne protecting her embezzling son and Madame de Launay watchful for her son's interests, both in *Adèle*, Mme Marceau in *Nathalie*, or the heroine's manipulative aunt in *Dora*. The dichotomy between the often excessive maternal instincts for sons and the neglect of girls is sufficiently marked to suggest some personal relevance for Kavanagh, though no evidence exists for this.)

The first mother substitute in Kavanagh's fiction is Aunt Radegonde in *Nathalie* (see Chapter 7), where the old woman is good hearted and fond but woefully naive and childlike. Mary, in *Daisy Burns*, goes against the pattern somewhat, in being practical and supportive to the young girl, but the unusual nature of the story probably demanded such a figure, for propriety's sake as well as to provide a contrast with the artistic hero. In *Grace Lee*, Grace's guardians are good natured but peripheral. The pattern becomes clearer in *Rachel Gray*, where Rachel's stepmother assumes the right to control her adult stepdaughter, though it is the latter's work which keeps them both. For loving kindness in this bleak work, the heroine must watch others - Richard Jones with his daughter, and the old Frenchwoman Madame Rose, as she cares for a mentally deficient girl. In *Adèle*, Mlle de Janson is the woman who gives minimal attention to her godchild, leaving her to the attentions of servants and strangers when it suits her. The weakest of Kavanagh's mother figures - a real mother for once - is in *Beatrice* where the heroine's widowed mother marries a manipulative trickster whose sole interest is to assume control over Beatrice's inheritance, and who uses the girl's concern for her ineffectual parent to effectively cheat her out of the estate.

Caring and uncaring fathers

The depiction of fathers in Kavanagh's fiction is dominated, of course, by the portrayal of Thomas Gray in *Rachel Gray*, (with its counterpoint of the love felt by Richard Jones for his daughter) but in general, there is a complexity of approach which reveals the author's ambivalence. An odd preface to her treatment of the subject of fathers in her adult fiction is Kavanagh's approach to the three young boys in *The Three Paths*^[10] where the sons of an aristocrat and a rich bourgeois doctor reflect their father's social mores exactly while the third, the presumably illegitimate baby of a peasant woman found dead in a ditch, is free to be his own person. Marguerite "Daisy" Burns' grandfather in *Daisy Burns* is an early examination of the paternal relationship. Estranged from his daughter, Daisy's mother, his attitude to his granddaughter is wilful and neglectful. For the greater part of the novel, Cornelius undertakes with endless affection the office of father to the orphaned girl. The bond which might have been expected does not exist; that which sees Daisy through the end of her childhood is a gift of love. In *Adèle*, the affection of William Osborne for the adolescent heroine left in his care by Mlle. de Janson is more avuncular than paternal, but there is something of the pattern of Daisy's relationship to Cornelius about it.

Kavanagh re-addressed the theme in a much more ambiguous way in *Queen Mab*,^[11] where the heroine, abandoned as a small child, is given a home by a man deeply implicated in the machinations which have led to her plight. The mixture of genuine affection which develops and guilt are never entirely resolved. The father in *Sybil's Second Love* is both a caring father and a weak one, who may or may not have been guilty of a crime, while in *Bessie*, the heroine's guardian is obsessed with assuming control over a woman he believes to be his dead son's widow and her child. Her coolness and secretiveness (she proves to be the wife of his disliked nephew, rather than his son) allow Kavanagh full reign to draw a relationship without affection but in which the man seeks to exert authority and domination which is oppressive yet without malignancy. In doing so, she is able to separate elements of the paternal relationship which are normally intermingled.

Manipulative and passionate women

Aside from the interrelated problems of familial relations which are central to much of Kavanagh's work, there are some other recurrent themes which engage her unusually. The three which follow have the unusual characteristic of informing both Kavanagh's fiction and non-fiction.

It has been remarked in Chapter 3 and 4 that Kavanagh was exercised particularly strongly by the



Mme de Tencin

problem of dealing with Mme de Tencin, (1682-1749) the lapsed nun and society adventuress, the difference between whose scandalous lifestyle and delicately sensitive writings she found hard to resolve. A key phrase in her description of Tencin in *French Women of Letters* (Vol.I, p. 280) which has already been mentioned in Chapter 4 (see p. 45) refers to the element of passion which Tencin emphasised in her *Memoirs of Comminge*.

Passion is the morbid work of the imagination, the refinement of the senses, both bent on one visible object of beauty, and it makes all else in life seem worthless till they are gratified. It is the subtle worship of self, but under a nobler guise than that of self, though essentially the same worship.

Kavanagh's definition of passion in terms of self-love or self absorption provides the common denominator to her otherwise apparently inconsistent treatment of passionate and manipulative women, in her fiction. The manipulative nature many of this group of characters exhibit is, like their passion, a manifestation of self-regard, and explains the way in which Kavanagh appears to associate the two characteristics. Both are clearly displayed in Kavanagh's earliest picture of such a woman, Miriam Russell in *Daisy Burns*. When the beautiful young woman first appears as the niece of Cornelius O'Reilly's neighbour, she appears calm and gentle, devoted to her young sister. When that sister dies, however, Miriam appears almost to forget her; her devotion was, in Kavanagh's moral universe, born of passion rather than love. On the same basis, Miriam's final breach with Cornelius arises because he cannot meet the egocentric needs of her nature by giving her the passionate worship she requires. When she finally admits damaging a painting for which Daisy was blamed, she proclaims

“I have tried to make you feel what I call passion, I have failed; it is well that we should part; let us do so quietly, and without recrimination.”^[12]

None of the many passionate or manipulative women who appear in Kavanagh’s novels are quite like Miriam Russell, who is probably closer to being a modern version of Madame de Tencin than any other, but all can be traced to some element of self-love. Mrs Osborne, William’s scheming stepmother in *Adèle* needs power rather than passion, while Dora’s aunt in *Dora, A Tale* betrays her niece from a passionate desire to protect the interests of her son. Blanche Cain, in *Sybil’s Second Love*^[13] has been a friend to Sybil Kennedy as her teacher at school, but has a passion for wealth and display which leads her to scheme to marry Sybil’s father. In all these cases, Kavanagh suggests that none of them are evil - even Mrs Osborne in her way seeks to provide for her own son and daughters - but all, as Daisy Burns in later life reflects on Miriam,

“might have been good but for one mistaken idea - that good and evil are indifferent in themselves; and great but for one sin - self-idolatory” (Vol. II, p. 173).

Kavanagh and the independent woman

The moral repugnance which Kavanagh evidently felt for such self-centred women is, at first sight, difficult to reconcile with her usual independent heroines. Except when young, (the early parts of *Adèle*, *Bessie*, *Beatrice*, *Queen Mab* and *Two Lilies*) they are consistently self-reliant. In the one novel where the heroine’s childhood occupies more than half the novel, *Daisy Burns*, the young heroine is markedly independent in opinions. The moral stance which underpinned Kavanagh’s views on the passionate woman does, however, allow a justification to be constructed, though it is not one which Kavanagh herself clearly sets out in its positive form. The case of *Adèle* provides a useful basis for examining this. There are two strong women opposed in the novel, both active and resourceful in the pursuit of their aims. One is Adèle herself; the other is Mrs Osborne, her husband’s stepmother. It is even possible to grant a degree of justification for the latter’s actions in terms of concern for her family. The moral difference for Kavanagh lies, once again, in the element of “self-idolatory”, as the pious Kavanagh terms it, in the motivation of the older woman.

An interesting element of the conflict between the two is that Adèle is not shown as acting from any Olympian moral standpoint; in Chapter 36, there is a struggle for authority between them when Adèle forces Mrs Osborne to recognise her status by calling her "Mrs William".^[14] Adèle is angry and proud, but that pride arises from self-respect, not self-love - "If I have no virtues of my own that you can respect me for, I tell you that, as his wife, you shall respect me."

The pattern is consistent throughout the novels; Madeleine Guerin is perhaps the simplest case; she pursues her cause because she believes it to be the will of God. Rachel Gray remains true to her simple convictions, while the heroine of *Dora* is prepared to work at copying paintings to support the household when her small fortune is lost. All of them are supported to some extent by a simple faith in God which, in Kavanagh's terms, places them beyond the temptation of either the direct or reflected form of self-worship that she criticised in de Tencin.

A feminised Catholicism

Though her Catholicism was, for Kavanagh, the central pillar of her moral structure, it is worthy of notice that her expression of it is an unusual one. In the entire structure of her adult fiction, only three priests appear in any individualised aspect; the two elderly village curés of *Madeleine* are good hearted but simple men who provide a degree of comic relief, while in the short story "An Excellent Opportunity" from *Seven Years and Other Tales*^[15] the priest is in the familiar role of attending a presumed dying man in the hope of a bequest to the Church. In a patriarchal structure such as the Catholic church, this suggests a certain independence of attitude.

Instead of priests, Kavanagh concentrates on inner prayer and love of God among her characters, which give the clear impression that she felt that Christian duty was to be found in the conscience rather than the hierarchy. She does, however, give a certain amount of attention - though touched with a certain scepticism to women in religious orders. The Canoness, M. de Sainville's aunt in *Nathalie* is such a one, though the only restriction on her comfortable life is presumably that of celibacy. It should, however, be remembered that Jeanne Jugan, the original for Madeleine,

founded an order, though the question of Kavanagh's attitude to the way Jugan was later treated by the Catholic hierarchy is open to interpretation (see Note 1, p. 38).

The members of the religious life for whom Kavanagh displayed a clear affection were the charitable, rather than the contemplative orders of nuns. It has already been mentioned that Kavanagh returned to the example of Jugan on many occasions, and her final completed novel *Two Lilies*, suggests this never waned. The novel, as an aside, introduces the character of sister Martha - significantly described as a "little sister", who runs a home for old people. The character is "no longer young" but immensely happy. It is tempting to conclude that, possibly, this is a portrait of the real Jugan, whom Kavanagh by then may have contrived to visit, particularly because she allows the old nun an opportunity to explain her life:

"You do not suppose that we do anything wonderful? . . . not a bit. We do it because we are meant to do it. It gives us no trouble, and costs so little that we are quite amazed at the fuss some people make with us. Why, we would not change lots with the Empress!"^[16]

Kavanagh was by no means so lenient with the fashion for new orders; in the same novel, she ridicules Mrs Cowper, a rich eccentric with a passion for the Middle Ages, who wishes to build almshouses in the Gothic style for "old women who are to wear dimity . . . and such quaint medieval caps" (p. 137). The contrast with the down-to-earth Sister Martha is hard to miss.

Kavanagh and retribution

The other defining characteristic of Kavanagh's faith and moral attitudes which prevails throughout the novels is in her attitude to retribution for evil. Evidently a whole-hearted believer in the maxim that "vengeance is mine, saith the Lord", Kavanagh consistently eschews any form of earthly punishment for malice or even her hated self-idolatry. It is too persistent a characteristic of the plots to be an accident, though Kavanagh is too aware of the needs of her readers not to allow the perpetrators to feel the chagrin of their failed attempts. Even in *Beatrice*, where the heroine's stepfather attempts to poison her so that her estate falls to her mother, and thus to his control, the man suffers only by losing the house he has plotted for when it is burned down. Similarly, Mrs

Osborne suffers for her plots against Adèle only by her final loss of influence over William; she ends with her daughter married to the Baron, and with her future secure.

It is perhaps as a corollary to this attitude that, even where Kavanagh deplores the character of someone as she did that of Madame de Tencin, she writes in terms of the happiness they have lost by their failings of character, rather than the punishment which Kavanagh's church taught was the judgement for unrepentant sinners.

Notes

- [1] (London, Colburn, 1848)
- [2] There are, as Madeleine seeks funding for her hospital, considerable travels, but she remains firmly based on her home village, and her efforts are focused on benefits to her own community.
- [3] (London, Colburn, 1850)
- [4] (London, Bentley, 1853)
- [6] (London, Hurst and Blackett, 1875)
- [7] (London, Hurst and Blackett, 1858)
- [8] (London, Bentley, 1853)
- [9] (London, Hurst and Blackett, 1877)
- [10] (London, Chapman and Hall, 1848)
- [11] (London, Hurst and Blackett, 1863)
- [12] *Daisy Burns* (London, Bentley, 1853) Vol. II, p. 166.
- [13] (London, Hurst and Blackett, 1867). In the surviving records of Dickens' *Household Words*, this is credited as being written by Kavanagh and Dickens' sub-editor, W.H.Wills. The extent of Wills' input is not identifiable, but the story is not dissimilar to Kavanagh's other Paris tales in the collection.
- [14] Page 259 of the 1862 edition.
- [15] (London, Hurst and Blackett, 1860) Vol. II.
- [16] (London, Hurst, 1877) p. 117 of the 1889 single volume edition).

Chapter 11: Conclusions

This study has the general title “Julia Kavanagh in her Times”. This recognises the likelihood that a significant element of this work relates to Kavanagh’s significance as a part of the developments in early to mid- Victorian literature. Nevertheless, it would be inappropriate to this summary of the conclusions to be drawn from this initial survey of her work to concentrate on her contemporary significance without seeking also to discuss her general qualities as a writer. Both of these are therefore discussed in this chapter. To a certain degree, an examination of the particular qualities and characteristics to be found in Kavanagh’s œuvre is made simpler by the neglect of her work in the twentieth century. If, as has been argued earlier, the rapid lapse in interest in her work derived in significant part from its popular association with values which had become unfashionable by the close of the nineteenth century, it is easier for a modern reader to approach her work from an unbiased standpoint.

Such a re-evaluation ought, however, to give adequate weight to the cultural significance accorded to Kavanagh in her own time, both in the earliest, critically successful if inconsistent part of her career, and to her later work, which was, for the most part, professional but increasingly formulaic. The central period from 1856 to 1863, during which *Rachel Gray*, *Adèle*, *Queen Mab* and the two parts of *Women of Letters* were produced may be regarded as one in which her personal vision and professionalism found a happy balance. The attitudes of her contemporaries during all phases of her career have been considered at some length in Chapter 5, and need not be repeated here. As discussed in Chapter 2, however, a study of the content of Kavanagh’s novels offers useful insights into the operation of the literary market place during her career, particularly in terms of her novels. To a certain, more limited, extent the non-fiction work on the historical status of women can also be taken as an indicator of attitudes to the status of women during the first half of her life,

though in this context it needs to be borne in mind that Kavanagh's ideas on the subject reflect a particular viewpoint influenced by her religious views and unusual upbringing. Kavanagh's need to express such ideas is itself indicative of the existence of intellectual and cultural factors to which they were a response.

In this study, it has been difficult to discuss Kavanagh's fiction without reference to the huge influence on her output exerted by the example of Brontë's *Jane Eyre*. A caveat needs to be entered on this point; Kavanagh was not, as the foregoing chapters, particularly Chapter 7 on *Nathalie*, have sought to show, a mere imitator. Had she been so, much of her fiction could safely be consigned to a quantitative footnote in surveys of Victorian genre literature. The contribution of a thoughtful writer like Kavanagh, however, is a much more complex affair than can be expected of hack writers who seek merely to cash in on a popular success; they can provide explorations of issues raised by the original inspiration that simple imitations cannot. Thus, the differences between the emotional worlds of *Jane Eyre* and *Nathalie* are as revealing as their unmistakable similarities. The amusing "conversation" which Patsy Stoneman constructs between the heroines of the two novels highlights the latter^[1], but the emotional tone which Kavanagh employs - less emotionally identified with her heroine than Brontë, and substituting a more detached and amused tolerance which suggests the influence of Austen - shows the other side of the coin. The areas where the two authors are in accord - such as their detestation of the ennui forced upon middle-class women - are balanced by a very different emotional make-up with Kavanagh's instinctive mistrust of the passion which Brontë makes one of Jane's dominant characteristics. To simply say that Kavanagh was influenced by *Jane Eyre* is simplistic; more detailed analysis helps to reveal the effects of different currents of literary influence which made that influence a constructive one. In Chapter 2, Kavanagh's output was examined in terms of her responses to changing literary fashions throughout most of her career. She demonstrated a degree of adeptness in incorporating elements which the reading public had shown an appetite for into her own work, but stopped well short of imitation, save for the overwhelming impact of *Jane Eyre* on her subject matter. Even with Brontë's example, however, she approached the central situation in a manner which employed a more humorous and

less dramatic perspective. It may fairly be said, therefore, that she displays an individual style in relation to narrative structures which were, as she wrote, becoming the staples of a particular genre of novel. (To an extent, the French locales and characters of Kavanagh's novels raised her output to the level of a sub-genre, which itself attracted imitators).

While the subjects, structures and themes of most of Kavanagh's novels owed a debt to Brontë, the narrative viewpoint and most of the stylistic influences derived from an earlier generation of writers, particularly Austen and - despite Kavanagh's disclaimers - something of Charlotte Smith, whose qualities, for Kavanagh, can be inferred from her treatment of them in *English Women of Letters* and *French Women of Letters*. From her contemporaries - whether at the instance of her various publishers or her own reading - she largely selected thematic elements which had proved popular - or, more occasionally, because they struck a chord in Kavanagh's own make up. Whatever their origins, these popular elements were incorporated into Kavanagh's own distinctive moral world, making her much more than a simple marker buoy in the literary currents of her day. Her work is worthy of study on its own merits, and the sidelights such a study offers on the world of nineteenth-century fiction and non fiction are incidental. The pattern of borrowings highlights, rather than distracts from the consistency of attitudes and approaches which, as we have seen, particularly in Chapter 10 Kavanagh maintained throughout her life.

The inevitable sparseness of biographical material on Kavanagh which arises from the combination of a scarcity of documents by or about her, her foreign domicile and her naturally reclusive nature means that the present study contains a greater element of speculative material than would be the case with most nineteenth-century authors. In particular, this speculation has been employed in the case of Kavanagh's correspondence with the *Athenaeum* discussed in Chapter 8, and in relation to the period of her two critical failures, *Grace Lee* and *Daisy Burns*. The limited evidence of her poverty, and the need to care for her mother seems contributory to an explanation of the lapse of standards at this time.^[2] It should, nevertheless, be recognised that Kavanagh's inconsistency in performance at this time did not indicate any inconsistency in her attitudes and

interests - *Grace Lee*, for all its faults, is in part an attempt by Kavanagh to construct the idea of a truly independent woman.

In the course of this study, I have indicated evidence for the view that Kavanagh's work possesses sufficient quality, homogeneity and individuality to justify continued attention, both from the point of view of the general reader - at least of Victorian fiction - and from the literary historian. Insofar as the first of these is concerned, I have sought to show, at different points in this study, that Kavanagh was, in general, a skilled writer. Among the examples cited are the blizzard scene in *Madeleine* (see Chapter 6, page 68), the description of the old fountain in *Nathalie* (see Chapter 7, page 76) and the extended reading of Chapter 2 of *Adèle* (see Chapter 8 and Annex 1). That is not to say that Kavanagh was entirely happy with the *structural* demands of the three-volume novel demanded by the circulating libraries, but she was scarcely alone in this.^[3] Her style appears to have been better suited to the single-volume format in which her two most personal works, *Madeleine* and *Rachel Gray* appeared, but after *Daisy Burns*, with its narrative dead ends and repetitious situations, she developed strategies by which her novels often broke down into distinct phases - before and after marriage in *Adèle*, the child and the adult Lily Bertram in *Two Lilies*, or the use of two distinct places, often one French and the other English or Irish as in *Dora*, *Queen Mab*, *Beatrice* and *Bessie*, which helps to give shape to the long narrative.

There are, however, many Victorian writers whose eclipse is not due to lack of narrative skill, style or content but simply to a lack of individuality in their writings. Unless Kavanagh's work demonstrates distinctive elements there can be only limited value in its study. At the beginning of this study, two particular aspects of Kavanagh's work were mentioned which offered a *prima facie* suggestion of a potential individuality. The first of these was the subject matter offered by Kavanagh's experience of French life and education. The second - obvious immediately from a list of her works - was the focus on the experience and contribution of women in history. To a considerable degree, the validity of assuming the existence of both these attributes has been more than adequately demonstrated in earlier chapters. The individuality which Kavanagh's work exhibits is not, however confined to the simple existence of these elements, but must be extended to include a

particular sensibility which is shared by both the fiction and non-fiction, and which appears to be closely integrated with both.

The parameters of that sensibility have been discussed in passing throughout this study, but those discussions have been incidental to the works under discussion at that time. It seems appropriate, therefore, to attempt some synthesis in conclusion as to the governing attributes of Kavanagh's approach, and to the elements of her experience which may have formed them. Her personal experience following her assumption of responsibility for looking after her mother and making a living for them both appears to have been a major factor in developing her outlook. From the beginning, her heroines exhibit a strong streak of self-reliance. That self-reliance, however, has its own characteristic elements. From Madeleine Guerin onwards, the typical Kavanagh heroine is driven by a sense of self-respect, but - with the exception of the heroine of *Grace Lee*, who for a significant part of the novel is one of the richest women in England - acts only to the degree necessary for that self-respect or to meet the dictates of duty. There is occasionally a sense that these young women possess in common a moral map which sets an invisible boundary where self-respect moves into self-aggrandisement. It is more than possible that some part of Kavanagh's moral education may have been at the hands of nuns, and that she may have absorbed some of their prohibitions against distinguishing themselves as individuals. In other hands, such rigorously prescribed bounds of conduct could risk the characters becoming puppets for the demonstration of a moral code, but Kavanagh avoids this, in part because her heroines are sufficiently rounded, and - it has to be surmised - because they share their perceptions with the personally reticent author herself.

Her active but demure young women are also shaped, like their creator, by their faith. Even where Catholicism is not prescribed, as in *Rachel Gray*, each character clearly holds to a faith which is the moral centre of their life. To some degree, even what I have described above as their self-respect is in part a respect for a self which is God's creation. If Kavanagh's heroines share elements of their creator's religious and moral sense, however, they appear also to share some of her problems. If Kavanagh herself spent much of her life working to achieve respect (and to give her her due, she seems always to be more concerned with self-respect than its public image, respectability),

her characters' stories are substantially devoted to the same object. To relate this to the four novels which have been individually examined in earlier chapters, in *Madeleine*, the heroine is unmoved by - indeed, has difficulties with - the praise she attracts for her work, but can be satisfied only when her duty to God is done. In *Nathalie*, the hero and heroine can be reunited only when each is able to respect the other:

The promise of eternal affection she had once required now came unsought; the obedience he had once exacted was now yielded unasked. (p. 472, 1854 edition).

With Rachel Gray, her solitary nature makes the need for self-respect still more clear; unlike Madeleine Guerin, there can be no upswelling of love and respect from her community, and at times, such as when she is required to patronise the new grocer's shop by her employer, while Richard Jones's business fails, she is unable to act as her conscience would dictate. The independence she gains at the end of the novel is one of meagre subsistence, but her integrity, as she cares for her small group of dependants, is intact. The more conventional format which Kavanagh employs for *Adèle* allows a greater recognition of its heroine's moral integrity in the form of her husband's full respect.

Self-reliance and self respect are also crucial elements of Kavanagh's preoccupation with the achievements of women, whether in religion, in the development of French culture, or in the development of the novel. Her treatment of these matters make it clear that she valued both characteristics, but did not confuse them. Kavanagh's views reflect clearly the values of her age and religion, even where she appears to part company with her contemporaries by the simple fact of her advocacy of a distinct female contribution. Self-reliance is an almost universal characteristic of the subjects of her biographical subjects; in order to create the achievements - whether they were religious, cultural or artistic - for which they could be memorialised by Kavanagh, they needed a degree of vision and persistence in societies which made such attributes either uncommon for women, or which would treat them as trivial in comparison with those of men.

Almost all of the subjects whose achievements were recorded by Kavanagh in *Women of Christianity* (some of the earliest of whom were probably either mythical or the subject of

myth-making) are, by their nature, exempt from Kavanagh's more critical analyses, though some groups, such as the contemplative orders, are the subject of reservations. Their motivation, for Kavanagh, was the love of God, and given her personal attitude to self-respect as respect for God's creation, it was difficult to find fault in these subjects, though she must, as a devout Catholic, have been aware that one of the great temptations for those in the religious life was that towards singularity - placing their individual opinions over those of their order's Rule. In her other biographical surveys, however, there is a clear pattern in Kavanagh's judgements in which she criticises those who go beyond the very clear concept of self-respect she had into the realms of selfishness. In some instances, where she had no element of immorality to shore up these judgements, she reverts to a suggestion of unwomanly behaviour. Her ambivalence towards Charlotte Smith is a revealing example, where Kavanagh seems to have based her criticism of a woman with whom she had much in common on Smith's readiness to complain publicly about her estranged husband, and the lawyers who delayed her inheritance until the last year of her life. Such behaviour was markedly different from Kavanagh's own discretion, and suggests that her personal diffidence was the subject of a philosophical justification. That does not, of course, mean that her attitudes arose from such a theoretical basis; it seems likelier that Kavanagh, with her religious faith and philosophical bent, would be attracted to a self-constructed set of principles which unified both her intellectual and psychological attitudes.

Not everything in Kavanagh's personal sensibility is, however, directly religious in origin. Much in her work reflects the direct influence of her experience, though, as mentioned in respect, particularly, of *Rachel Gray*, some experiences were digested for several years before being reflected in her work. Her acquaintanceships over the years must, on the evidence of her works, have been unusually wide, covering several cultures - Ireland and Italy make appearances in her novels as well as England and France and a diverse mix of classes in each. Her Parisian working classes are distinct in attitudes and speech from her Normandy peasants.^[4] While Kavanagh can write with knowledgeable clarity about the restrictive ennui of life in M. de Sainville's chateau in *Nathalie*, there seems equal experience in her portrayal of the lives of the urban respectable poor in *Rachel*

Gray or the small fictions of the lowest edges of the middle classes in *Dora*^[5]. One unusual area of familiarity for a woman author is Kavanagh's apparent familiarity with business, from Osborne's counting house in *Adèle* to the French stationery business in which John Dorrien is employed.

The reticent author Julia Kavanagh in fact conceals a woman with a remarkable range of experience in different social classes and cultures, with an unusual range of education and a taste for intellectual pursuits. To this was added a distinctive personal philosophy and sense of justice, particularly for the reputation and recognition of her own sex which provides a discreet but readily identifiable thread which links her career. Her cultural experience was made more unusual by the way in which she was simultaneously both integrated into the various cultures to which her upbringing subjected her, and given a degree of objectivity by her knowledge of others. That breadth of knowledge was not simply geographic but - as argued in Chapter 1 - also temporal in nature, in that the young Kavanagh appears to some extent to have been placed outside the mainstream of literary fashion and exposed to an unusually extensive range of writers. The example of her father, however suspect his own theories, may also have developed in his daughter an interest in investigating the underlying patterns in that reading. These also marked her career.

There is, however, evidence that that career might have been a different one. *Madeleine* and *Rachel Gray* offer the possibility of a more distinctive body of work, though whether it would have been as popular is a moot point; the later book did not repeat the success of the earlier one. It is useless, however, to speculate too much on such possibilities; Mrs Charles Martin's article on Kavanagh argues that she tailored her novels in some ways to please her mother^[6] but, had she not devoted much of her life to her mother's care, she would perhaps have been a very different person. The body of work she did leave is both sufficiently distinctive to merit further study, and sufficiently reflective of Julia Kavanagh's times to add to our understanding of the tastes and ideas that prevailed at a time when - often thanks to women (as Kavanagh was so eager to demonstrate) - the novel was in one of its most innovative periods.

In that innovation, her direct part was a small one, since, though she was clearly influenced herself, her more personal work itself had no obvious influence on others apart from the use of

French locales. That slight exoticism of culture was the most obvious element which distinguished Kavanagh from her competitors, but it was by no means the only one. She was a Catholic writing in a preponderantly Anglican or dissenting society. She was a self-supporting single woman writing largely of women whose destiny was marriage to a protective provider. Her primary readership, given the cost of books, was middle class, yet though both her origins and her later life lay in that class, she had known poverty well, and, particularly in her short stories and more personal novels, chose the poor as her subject matter. In all these respects, she approached her subjects as a multiple outsider, which, perhaps, gave her an independence of vision which suited the independence of her female characters.

That independence was characterised in Kavanagh by a sense of self and gender respect. There is a discernible inner tension in her work between her personal reticence and the satisfaction she must have felt at her success, and it may in part be this which helped her develop and clarify her ideas of the history of women's achievements. Such a concept could legitimise a sense of pride and self-worth without risk of the self-love which she feared. Her work in this area may well have been more influential than can easily be traced. Her insistence on the evidence for a female tradition of influence, while less easy to identify among her successors than genres or archetypal plots, may have contributed to the slow growth of ideas which, developing slowly through writers such as Virginia Woolf, have greatly influenced perceptions from the 1960s on. Kavanagh's female tradition is very different from - indeed is often at odds with - the precepts of twentieth-century feminist criticism, but it shares with it an unshakeable conviction of the value of women's contributions in many spheres.

Notes

- [1] Stoneman, Patsy, *Brontë Transformations: The Cultural Dissemination of Jane Eyre and Wuthering Heights* (Hemel Hempstead, Prentice Hall, 1996).
- [2] This should not, however, discount the problems Kavanagh may have experienced in engaging, for the first time, on works for which she had to provide the overall structure; *Madeleine*, in contrast, had its real-life original and *Nathalie* the example of *Jane Eyre*, though Kavanagh made considerable alterations to both.

- [3] John Sutherland, in his *Longman Companion to Victorian Fiction* (Harlow, Longman, 1988) stigmatises the format as encouraging “narrative padding, especially a profusion of short-sentenced dialogue by which expanses of white paper could be used up” (1990 edition, p. 628). Kavanagh was often guilty, though her dialogue was at least well-constructed.

- [4] *Seven Years and other tales* (London, Hurst and Blackett, 1860 [1859]) is almost exclusively set in Paris, and was probably planned as a collection, only one story appearing elsewhere. *Forget-Me-Nots* (London, Hurst and Blackett, 1877) was compiled after Kavanagh’s death, by C.W.Wood, probably in consultation with Bridget Kavanagh, many of the stories (especially the Manneville series) having already been published. As a result, it is less homogenous, but a preponderance of the stories are of Norman peasantry, and these are quite distinct from those in *Seven Years* and are clearly unified in tone.

- [5] Where the old spinet in the parlour is solemnly referred to by all as the more fashionable piano.

- [6] “Indeed, she occasionally half laughingly complained that Mrs Kavanagh’s inveterate objections to unhappy endings somewhat hampered her ... for, as she argued, to make everybody happy all round is not exactly true to life” (Mrs C M Martin, “The Late Julia Kavanagh” in *The Irish Monthly*, vol. vi pp. 96-100).

Julia Kavanagh: A Bibliography

Details of editions of full length works have been compiled and collated from the British Library Catalogue, and from *The London Catalogue of Books published in Great Britain 1816-51* (London, Hodgson, 1853), *The English Catalogue of Books published in Great Britain from January 1855 to January 1863* (London, Sampson Low, 1864) and its succeeding volumes ... *Vol.2 from January 1863 to January 1872* (London, Sampson Low, 1873), ... *Vol. 3 from January 1872 to December 1880* (London, Sampson Low, Marston, Searle and Rivington, 1882), ... *Vol. 4 from January 1881 to December 1889* (London, Sampson Low, Marston & Co., 1891), ... *Vol. 5 from January 1890 to December 1897* London, Sampson Low, Marston & Co., 1898) and ...*Vol. 6 from January 1898 to December 1900* (London, Sampson Low, Marston & Co., 1901)

NOVELS

(N.B. No attempt has been made to identify *all* editions published in the United States. Those listed (in square brackets) appear in the *Cumulative Title Index to the Library of Congress Shelflist through 1981* and may not be the first or only printing; that for *Daisy Burns* is described as the 9th edition.

The Three Paths: a story for youth (London, Chapman and Hall, 1848), price 5/-. This is the only edition shown in the British Library catalogue; however, a reduced price printing (2/6) came out under the imprint of H Bohn, at an unknown date.

Madeleine: a tale of Auvergne, founded on fact. First published London, by Bentley, in 1848, at 10/6d. A price reduction to 7/6 was introduced in 1851, and a new edition in 1859 at 2/6d. There was a further edition in 1870 at 2/6d. and 4/-. In 1873, Chapman produced a 2/- edition. The last edition was in 1884-86, by Ward Locke, priced at 2/-. [New York, Appleton, 1857]

Dora (London, Hurst and Blackett, 1868) (3 vols.) at 31/6d. The only British edition. [New York, Appleton, 1868].

Sylvia (London, Hurst and Blackett, 1870) (3 vols.) at 31/6d. The only British edition. No American edition identified.

Bessie, a novel (London, Hurst and Blackett, 1872) (3 vols.) at 31/6d. The only British edition.*

* According to Robert Wolff, in *Nineteenth Century Fiction: A bibliographical Catalogue based on the Collection formed by R L Wolff* (New York, Garland, 1982) Vol. II, the title page of *Bessie* in its first American edition (New York, Appleton, 1872) lists her as the author of, inter alia, *Selina*; no trace of such a work by Kavanagh has been found.

John Dorrien (London, Hurst, 1875) (3 vols.) at 31/6d. The only British edition. No American edition identified.

Two Lilies (London, Hurst, 1877) (3 vols.) at 31/6d. A one-volume new edition at 2/- and 2/6d. was published by Blackett in 1889. No American edition identified.

COLLECTED SHORT STORIES

Seven Years and Other Tales (London, Hurst and Blackett, 1860 [1859]) (3 vols.) at 31/6d. A single volume Tauchnitz edition also appeared in 1859.[New York, Appleton, 1860].

Forget-Me-Nots (London, Bentley, 1878) (2 vols.), with an introduction by Charles W. Woods. The only British edition. No American edition identified.

NON-FICTION

Woman in France in the Eighteenth Century (London, Smith, Elder, 1850) (2 vols) at 24/-, reduced in 1852 to 12/-. A new 2 volume edition appeared in 1859 at 5/-, and a single volume edition in 1859 at the same price. [Philadelphia, Lea and Blanchard, 1850].

Women of Christianity (London, Smith and Elder, 1852) (1 volume) at 12/-, reduced in 1858 to 7/6d, and in 1859 to 5/-. No American edition identified.

A Summer and Winter in the Two Sicilies (London, Hurst and Blackett, 1858) at 21/-. A 2-volume Tauchnitz edition appeared in the same year. No American edition identified.

French Women of Letters: biographical sketches (London, Hurst and Blackett, 1861) (2 vols.) at 21/-. A Tauchnitz edition in 1 volume appeared in 1862. No American edition identified.

English Women of Letters: biographical sketches (London, Hurst and Blackett, [1862]1863) (2 vols.) at 21/-. A Tauchnitz edition in 1 volume appeared in 1862. No American edition identified.

SHORT STORIES

(Many of Kavanagh's short stories were published in various magazines and subsequently published in the two collections mentioned above. For convenience, those so listed are identified after the title by SY or F as appropriate. Listings are in alphabetic order of title. Magazine publications of short stories and non fiction have been identified through *Poole's Index of periodical literature* Vols. 1 to 4 (Gloucester, Mass., 1963) with the exception of "Perpétue: A Sketch" "John's Five Pound Note" and "Sister Anne", which were identified directly.)

"Adrien" (SY) No other publication traced.

"Annette's Love Story" (F) Published in America in *Littell's Living Age* (Boston) 108:291 (1870)

"The Broken Charm" (F) No other publication traced.

"By the Well" (F) First published in *Temple Bar* 23:76 (April 1868). One of the "Manneville" series. This story was also quoted in full in McQuoid's entry on Kavanagh in *Women Writers of Queen Victoria's Reign*.

"The Cheap Excursion" (SY) No other publication traced.

"Charlotte Morel" (F) No other publication traced.

"Clement's Love" (F) No other publication traced.

"A Comedy in a Court-Yard" (SY) No other publication traced.

"The Countess's Story" (F) No other publication traced.

"Cousin Jane" (F) No other publication traced.

"The Conscript" (SY) No other publication traced.

"An Excellent Opportunity" (SY) First published in *Household Words* 27 July 1850. According to the magazine's records, this was co-written or revised by W S Wills.

"The Experiences of Sylvie Delmare" (SY) No other publication traced.

"Gaiety and Gloom" (SY) No other publication traced.

"John's Five Pound Note" Published only as an unpaid contribution to the Victoria Press's *Victoria Regia* (London, Victoria Press, 1861).

"The Little Dancing-Master" (SY) No other publication traced.

"Louise Marchand: or the French Schoolmistress" published only in *People's Journal*, 3.165. This is as much a plea for the French system of registration and regulation of schoolteachers as a short story.

"Mimi's Sin" (F) First published in *Temple Bar* 22.470 (March 1868)

"Miller of Manneville" (F) First published in *Argosy*, 14:463. (1872) Also published *Littell's Living Age* 116:282 (1873)

"My Brother Leonard" (F) First published in *Temple Bar* 27.187 (September 1869)

"The Mysterious Lodger" (SY) No other publication traced.

"Nina, the Witch" (F) First published *Argosy* 16:196, 275. (1873) Also published *Littell's Living Age* 119:347 (1873)

"Perpétue: A Sketch" *Argosy* 26:431 (December 1878). This fragment may have been intended for inclusion in Kavanagh's original concept for *Forget-Me-Nots*.

"Phyllis and Corydon" (F) No other publication traced.

"Rénée" (F) No other publication traced.

"Seven Years" (S) No other publication traced; it is probably more sensible to consider this, the title story of *Seven Years: and other tales* as a nouvelle, since it extends for a total of 408 pages, more than the entire first volume of the work.

"Sister Anne" (F) First published in *All the Year Round* (May 9 1868, p.524, May 16 1868 p. 548, and May 23 1868, p.572.)

"A Soirée in a Porter's Lodge" (SY) No other publication traced.

"Story of Monique" (F) Published in America in *Littell's Living Age* 128:293 (1876).

"Story of a Letter" (F) First published in *Argosy* 26:30 (July 1878). Published in America in *Littell's Living Age* 138:366 (?1885)

"Sylvie's Vow" (F) No other publication traced.

"The Troubles of a Quiet Man" (SY) No other publication traced.

"A Young Girl's Secret" (F) No other publication traced.

"Young France" (SY) No other publication traced. While consistent with the other Parisian tales of *Seven Years*, this story is also in part, a parody of the more absurd posturings of the "Young England" movement; the principal character's name is Tancredi P. Matthieu.

SHORT NON-FICTION

"Glimpses of North Italy" in *Month* 1:112 (1864)

"Glimpses of Rome" in *Month* 2:199 (1865)

"The Montyon Prizes" in *Chambers Miscellany*, later published by Chambers as a separate pamphlet (London, Chambers, 1846) (BL shelfmark 8285. a. 71 (3.))

"Prizes of Virtue in France" in *People's Journal* 2:285 (November 1846)

"Recollections of an old city" (Geneva) in *Month* 1:25 (1864)

"The French Working Classes" in *People's Journal* 2:159 (September 1846)

"Literature of the Working Classes of France" in *People's Journal* 3:47 (June 1847)

Letters:

16 from Kavanagh, including 10 to Leitch Ritchie, 2 to William Chambers and 2 to William and Robert Chambers, plus 2 receipts signed by Kavanagh, (1849-1850) Edinburgh, National Library of Scotland in Dep.341/86-87 & 95-99.

2 from Kavanagh to Charles Gavan Duffy (1849-1850) Dublin, National Library of Ireland, Department of Manuscripts. In Ms.5757.

1 from Kavanagh to Mrs Williams (1850) Dublin, Trinity College (Dublin) Library. In MS6235/1.

1 from Kavanagh to Edward Walford (1861) Birmingham, Birmingham Reference Library. In MS135.

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Annex 1: *Adèle* Chapter 2

HOW THE WORLD WAS GOING AWAY IN THE MANOR OF COURCELLES.

- 1 "The world is going away," said Mademoiselle de Janson, "the world is going away."
Her melancholy look sought the high ceiling, then wandered over the oak-panelled walls of the old Hall, with its deep windows, until it finally came back to the stone chimney, high and deep, the smouldering wood fire, and the diminutive figure of her little goddaughter Adèle, sitting on
- 5 a low stool, with her hands clasped round her knees, and the light of the dying flame playing on her wistful young face.
Where is the world going to, Cousine?" she asked, looking up.
"There it is," exclaimed Mademoiselle de Janson, sitting up erect in her chair, "the very child asks where to, and who shall venture to answer the momentous question?"
- 10 She sank back with a sigh, and shut her eyes.
Where can the world be going to?" thought Adèle, very much puzzled; "I wish she would tell me." She looked up at her godmother, and her thoughts took another turn.
"How pretty she must have been," she thought; "how pretty she is still, - more than pretty, beautiful; more than beautiful, lovely."
- 15 "Open the window, child," murmured Mademoiselle de Janson, "it is quite close."
"Of course it is with a fire," thought Adèle, but she did as she was told.
"My head aches!" moaned Mademoiselle de Janson, feebly.
"Are you sure it is your head, Cousine?" doubtfully asked Adèle.
"Well," confidentially replied Mademoiselle de Janson, "I am not; strange I should not
- 20 know, is it not?"
"Very," replied Adèle, still looking admiringly at her cousin.
Mademoiselle de Janson had been a fair beauty, with golden hair, blue eyes, and an angelic face, and lovely she was still, at we will not say what age. She might be mad, as some said, or only whimsical, as the more indulgent averred; she certainly was peculiar, capricious to
- 25 the tip of her fingers, perverse in her ways, neither amiable nor kind, but she was lovely, and ever would be. Caprices, folly, faults without number, could not make her lose the gift; she was original, too, independent, and cared for nothing, or no one. Her favourite sentiment, "that the world was going away," gives a fair clue to her position and her character. A beauty must regret the past; a nobly-born and impoverished lady cannot look with favour on a new order of things. To be sure, revolutions had nothing to do with the late Monsieur de Janson's passion for
- 30 gambling; a passion that had left his daughter merely what the law would not allow him to touch - her mother's fortune, namely, the old manor in which she resided, and which she could not afford to keep in repair, a neglected garden and orchard, a few acres of indifferent land, and an object which, though a perfect eyesore to her aristocratic gaze, was, nevertheless, the chief source of her income, a forge let on an endless lease to an English capitalist, to whom, indeed,
- 35 the whole estate was heavily mortgaged.
Mademoiselle de Janson had grown accustomed to her poverty - to her old ruined manor; but she had never reconciled herself to her plebeian possession, the forge. It was visible, she declared, from every window of her dwelling; and in whatever room she sat, she could hear, she averred, its clanking. To abuse and hate this enemy had become one of the chief occupations of Mademoiselle de Janson's life.
- 40 Adèle had risen; she was standing in one of the deep windows; she looked at a wild landscape; a rugged road wound by a silent lake; rocks hemmed in her view to the left; dark mountains rose to the right, and enclosed the sheet of water; a vapoury sky of summer blue softened the hues and outlines of the scene; it looked vivid, living, eternal in its beauty.
"Cousine," suddenly said Adèle, turning round, "do tell me how you know the world is going away."
- 45 "Listen to that forge! - there, did you hear? And you ask if the world is going away! Take your doll, and play, child."
"I have no doll, Cousine."
"Well, play all the same. Go to the garden, child. I want to be alone."
- 50 Adèle, thus dismissed, quietly left the old Hall. As she closed the heavy oak door, she heard Mademoiselle de Janson repeating to herself, by the fireside, those ominous words, -
"The world is going away."
- 55

60 "How hard-hearted I must be," thought Adèle, half-remorsefully. "There is Cousine telling me from morning till night, from night till morning, that the world is going away; and I sleep as well, and eat and drink as heartily, and run and laugh, and sing, and enjoy myself, just as much as if the world were standing still the whole time."

As Adèle came to this conclusion respecting the hardness of her heart, she left to her right a heavy wooden staircase that led to the upper part of the house, and passing under a stone porch, reached the head of a flight of broken steps that descended to the yard, or, rather, court, around which the old mansion was built.

65 A quiet spot was that flagged and grass-grown court, silent and secluded like a cloister. Shade seemed to dwell there for evermore; it stole down the grey stone walls that enclosed it, walls massive and rock-built, with tufts of green ferns or pale pink flowers in every cranny; it lingered around the broken widows that looked down quaint and dark with many a pane gone from its leaden casing; it slept around the damp old well in the furthest angle, and deepened the gloom of its dark round hole that went down to meet the chill, tremulous water below, where, looking over the broad stone ledge, you ever saw the blue sky reflected in a cold, white circle. But one spot gave light to this grey and quiet picture. A low, arched door stood wide open near the well; it revealed a stone staircase winding up in obscurity a long, dim passage, a second door also wide open, and beyond it, vividly distinct, a green and sunny garden.

75 Whilst we have been describing, Adèle was crossing the court. She peeped in the well as she went by it, then passed under the low, arched door, crossed the long, sombre corridor, and came out at the other door. A broad garden, in the old and formal style, lay before her, and beyond it the outline of blue or wooded hills rose on the noonday sky. On a bench at the foot of a broken statue that had once guarded the entrance of a long gravelled walk, passing between stiff boxwood hedge-rows, an old peasant woman, dry and brown as a nut, in white round cap, black boddice, and striped woollen petticoat, sat in the sun, spinning her wheel with dazzling rapidity. On seeing Adèle, she nodded and smiled. The young girl smiled too, and without proceeding further, sat down on the stone step on which she had been standing, and resting her elbow on her knee, and her cheek on her hand, she watched curiously the swift motion of the old woman's wheel.

"How fast it goes, Jeannette," she said.

"Yes, Mamzelle, very fast."

90 A long pause followed these two remarks. Adèle de Courcelles was then a small young girl of sixteen; her figure was childish, but perfect; her face fair - spite her brown hair - and very pretty; for her features, though slight, were clear and distinct in their outlines. She had dark eyebrows, and beneath them darker azure eyes; a quick look, a prompt, though graceful bearing, and something in her whole aspect that spoke of a rapidity of thought, speech, and feeling, that seemed not to care for time.

100 Her story is soon told. She was an orphan - the last of a noble and fallen line. She lived in the old manor that had been built by her ancestors, and where for ages they had flourished; but she could not call five francs her own; - she was wholly dependent on the kindness of her cousin and godmother, Mademoiselle de Janson, who, as the daughter of an elder branch, was sole mistress of the once splendid patrimony of the Courcelles. Their name, an empty inheritance in modern France, was all Adèle possessed.

105 Mademoiselle de Janson had taken charge of the little orphan, and reared her; but as the world was going away, she had spent little on her education. It would have been foolish; and as the world was going away, where was the use of caring for anything in it? Adèle had grown up as she pleased, untaught, unloved, unchecked, and unheeded, and yet happy in her solitary liberty. Even as a wild flower blooms none the less sweetly than the garden blossom, for springing from the stone and growing amongst weeds; so, to all seeming, even though neglected from childhood - even though not surrounded by love and kindness from her birth - Adèle flourished as gaily and happily in the shade as others in the sun.

115 To live - to be - to exist - was sufficient, to the last of the De Courcelles. She cared for nothing - not even for herself. Temper, character, story, she as yet had not.

Jeannette was the first to speak again.

"When I was a girl," she said, with a sigh, "I remember seeing the spinning wheel of Madame la Marquise de Courcelles. It was pure ivory, inlaid with gold."

"Was it?" carelessly said Adèle.

120 "She was your great grandmother," pursued Jeannette, with another sigh.

Adèle said nothing, but pulled out a blade of grass that grew in a split of the stone step on which she sat, and examined it curiously.

125 "She was called Adèle, like you," continued Jeannette. "A handsome lady she was; and fine old times were those. Dozens of servants about the house - cooks, scullions, butlers, gardeners, and what not. There was not a stone wrong in the whole manor; and there was not a weed in the whole garden. Sad changes, Mamzelle Adèle, sad times."

130 "I dare say it is all for the best," philosophically said Adèle; and throwing away her blade of grass, she skipped down the steps, passed by Jeannette with a nod, and ran swift and light as a deer along the sunny path.

135 Everywhere around her she saw ruin and decay, but she heeded them not. The hedges might run wild, the fountains might cease to play, the statues might be defaced or broken - little mattered it to the careless girl, whilst she had space, air and liberty. And none of your modern mock gardens, that would fit in a drawing room, with a space to walk around, was the garden of Courcelles. It was vast as a park, a sort of provincial Versailles, once famous in its day. The varied and uneven nature of the ground had with difficulty been overcome by the obscure Le Notre, who designed alley, bosquet and parterre, and adorned every walk with its statues, and every arbour with its fountains; - but it had been overcome - and the result was a civilised garden in the very bosom of nature; around it wild hills, clothed with murmuring pine trees; 140 and at its feet a silent lake, on which the very wind reposed, so deep and fast seemed its enchanted sleep.

That little and wild mountain lake was one of the few friends which the solitary youth of Adèle had known, and she never passed it by without giving it a look. Bending over the broken stone balustrade, adorned with vases, where roses and geraniums still bloomed, she now 145 gazed down dreamily. With a low splash the clear green waters washed a flight of white steps leading to the garden - and every time they retreated they left bare and shining the broken stone, to which heavy wet mosses clung. How slow had crept the lazy sunbeams on that smooth glassy surface! How chill and deep was the dark bed on which the pebbles slept below! And Adèle knew them all; and as long as she could remember, she had seen them lying there, 150 visible and distinct, yet beyond reach of the rudest storm above. But she gave them no more than one look now. The sun was hot, and she longed for shade. She turned to her left, walked on through broad straight alleys, until she reached the boundary of this forsaken garden, - a high trellis, veiled by boxwood, and behind which she entered into a little grassy orchard, full of shade and sunshine. Scattered trees bent to the very earth their fruit-laden boughs, - hidden 155 in their dark branches birds sang their last song; the blackbird and the speckled thrush leaped along, or ran quickly in the high grass; bees hummed around their sunny hive, and on an old brown wall, which enclosed this pleasant little spot, ripened peaches of rich mellow bloom. At once Adèle stretched forth her hand, plucked the ripest, and sat down in the grass to eat it. It had all the exquisite flavour and melting lusciousness of that delicious fruit, and it satisfied even an epicure of sixteen. As she threw away the stone, Adèle indolently sank down in the 160 high grass, which closed over her.

Above her spread the green branches of an apple-tree, partly shading her from the sun, and partly revealing broad gaps of blue sky. Near her a little brook ran sparkling through the grass, rippling on a few grey stones with a broken murmur. The warmth and peace of noonday 165 enclosed this quiet place, and Adèle lay in the grass, happy, like any wild and careless young thing. Suddenly, and as a bird breaks out into song, she began to sing a long, monotonous and ancient ballad, which had not yet died away from the memories of men in this retired province; and as she sang, she thought, "Oh, no! the world is not going away; it is coming, coming fast."